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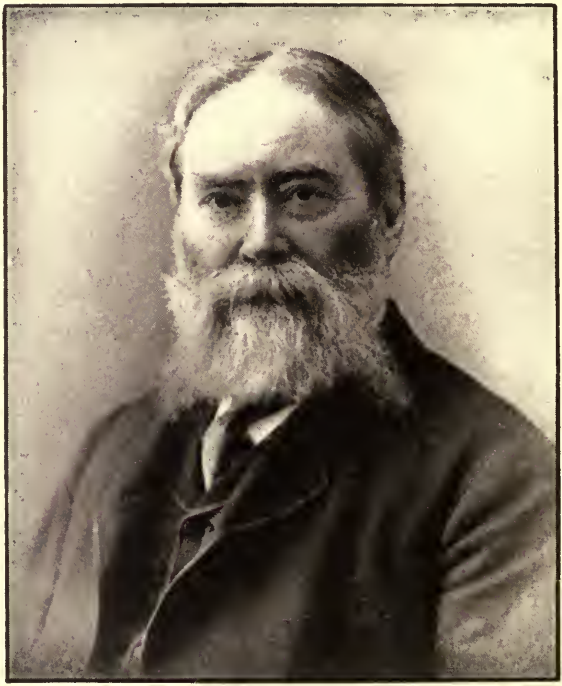

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

Merrill's English Texts

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL AND OTHER POEMS

BY

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY
JULIAN W. ABERNETHY, PH.D., PRINCIPAL OF
THE BERKELEY INSTITUTE, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

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PREFACE

THE aim of this edition of the *Vision of Sir Launfal* is to furnish the material that must be used in any adequate treatment of the poem in the class room, and to suggest other material that may be used in the more leisurely and fruitful method of study that is sometimes possible in spite of the restrictions of arbitrary courses of study.

In interpreting the poem with young students, special emphasis should be given to the ethical significance, the broad appeal to human sympathy and the sense of a common brotherhood of men, an appeal that is in accord with the altruistic tendencies of the present time; to the intimate appreciation and love of nature expressed in the poem, feelings also in accord with the present movement of cultured minds toward the natural world; to the lofty and inspiring idealism of Lowell, as revealed in the poems included in this volume and in his biography, and also as contrasted with current materialism; and, finally, to the romantic sources of the story in the legends of King Arthur and his table round, a region of literary delight too generally unknown to present-day students.

After these general topics, it is assumed that such matters as literary structure and poetic beauty will receive due attention. If the technical faults of the poem, which critics are at much pains to point out, are not discovered by the student, his knowledge will be quite as profitable. Additional reading in Lowell's works should be secured, and can be through the sympathetic interest and enthusiasm of the instructor. The following selections may be used for rapid examination and discussion: *Under the Willows*, *The First Snow-Fall*, *Under the Old Elm*, *Auf Wiedersehen*, *Sunthin' in the Pastoral Line*, *Jonathan to John*, *Mr. Hosea Biglow to the Editor of the Atlantic Monthly*, and the prose essays *My Garden Acquaintance* and *A Good Word for Winter*. The opportunity should not be lost for making the students forever and interestedly acquainted with Lowell, with the poet and the man.

The editor naturally does not assume responsibility for the character of the examination questions given at the end of this volume. They are questions that have been used in recent years in college entrance papers by two eminent examination boards.

J. W. A.

October 1, 1908.

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INTRODUCTION

LIFE OF LOWELL

In Cambridge there are two literary shrines to which visitors are sure to find their way soon after passing the Harvard gates, "Craigie House," the home of Longfellow and "Elmwood," the home of Lowell. Though their hallowed retirement has been profaned by the encroachments of the growing city, yet in their simple dignity these fine old colonial mansions still bespeak the noble associations of the past, and stand as memorials of the finest products of American culture.

Elmwood was built before the Revolution by Thomas Oliver, the Tory governor, who signed his abdication at the invitation of a committee of "about four thousand people" who surrounded his house at Cambridge. The property was confiscated by the Commonwealth and used by the American army during the war. In 1818 it was purchased by the Rev. Charles Lowell, pastor of the West Congregational Church in Boston, and after ninety years it is still the family home. Here was born, February 22, 1819, James Russell Lowell, with surroundings most propitious for the nurturing of a poet-soul. Within the stately home there was a refined family life; the father had profited by the unusual privilege of three years' study abroad, and his library of some four thousand volumes was not limited to theology; the mother, whose maiden name was Spence and who traced her Scotch ancestry back to the hero of the ballad of *Sir Patrick Spens*, taught her children the good old ballads

and the romantic stories in the *Fairie Queen*, and it was one of the poet's earliest delights to recount the adventures of Spenser's heroes and heroines to his playmates.

An equally important influence upon his early youth was the out-of-door life at Elmwood. To the love of nature his soul was early dedicated, and no American poet has more truthfully and beautifully interpreted the inspired teachings of nature, whispered through the solemn tree-tops or caroled by the happy birds. The open fields surrounding Elmwood and the farms for miles around were his familiar playground, and furnished daily adventures for his curious and eager mind. The mere delight of this experience with nature, he says, "made my childhood the richest part of my life. It seems to me as if I had never seen nature again since those old days when the balancing of a yellow butterfly over a thistle bloom was spiritual food and lodging for a whole forenoon." In the *Cathedral* is an autobiographic passage describing in a series of charming pictures some of those choice hours of childhood:

> "One summer hour abides, what time I perched,
> Dappled with noonday, under simmering leaves,
> And pulled the pulpy oxhearts, while aloof
> An oriole clattered and the robins shrilled,
> Denouncing me an alien and a thief."

Quite like other boys Lowell was subjected to the processes of the more formal education of books. He was first sent to a "dame school," and then to the private school of William Wells, under whose rigid tuition he became thoroughly grounded in the classics. Among his schoolfellows was W. W. Story, the poet-sculptor, who continued his life-long friend. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who was one of the younger boys of the school, recalls the high talk of Story and Lowell about the *Fairie Queen*. At fifteen he entered Harvard College, then an

institution with about two hundred students. The course of study in those days was narrow and dull, a pretty steady diet of Greek, Latin and Mathematics, with an occasional dessert of Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* or Butler's *Analogy*. Lowell was not distinguished for scholarship, but he read omnivorously and wrote copiously, often in smooth flowing verse, fashioned after the accepted English models of the period. He was an editor of *Harvardiana*, the college magazine, and was elected class poet in his senior year. But his habit of lounging with the poets in the secluded alcoves of the old library, in preference to attending recitations, finally became too scandalous for official forbearance, and he was rusticated, "on account of constant neglect of his college duties," as the faculty records state. He was sent to Concord, where his exile was not without mitigating profit, as he became acquainted with Emerson and Thoreau. Here he wrote the class poem, which he was permitted to circulate in print at his Commencement. This production, which now stands at the head of the list of his published works, was curiously unprophetic of his later tendencies. It was written in the neatly polished couplets of the Pope type and other imitative metres, and aimed to satirize the radical movements of the period, especially the transcendentalists and abolitionists, with both of whom he was soon to be in active sympathy.

Lowell's first two years out of college were troubled with rather more than the usual doubts and questionings that attend a young man's choice of a profession. He studied for a bachelor's degree in law, which he obtained in two years. But the work was done reluctantly. Law books, he says, "I am reading with as few wry faces as I may." Though he was nominally practicing law for two years, there is no evidence that he ever had a client, except the fictitious one so pleasantly described in his first magazine article, entitled *My First Client.*

From Coke and Blackstone his mind would inevitably slip away to hold more congenial communion with the poets. He became intensely interested in the old English dramatists, an interest that resulted in his first series of literary articles, *The Old English Dramatists*, published in the *Boston Miscellany*. The favor with which these articles were received increased, he writes, the "hope of being able one day to support myself by my pen, and to leave a calling which I hate, and for which I am not *well* fitted, to say the least."

During this struggle between law and literature an influence came into Lowell's life that settled his purposes, directed his aspirations and essentially determined his career. In 1839 he writes to a friend about a "very pleasant young lady," who "knows more poetry than any one I am acquainted with." This pleasant young lady was Maria White, who became his wife in 1844. The loves of this young couple constitute one of the most pleasing episodes in the history of our literature, idyllic in its simple beauty and inspiring in its spiritual perfectness. "Miss White was a woman of unusual loveliness," says Mr. Norton, "and of gifts of mind and heart still more unusual, which enabled her to enter with complete sympathy into her lover's intellectual life and to direct his genius to its highest aims." She was herself a poet, and a little volume of her poems published privately after her death is an evidence of her refined intellectual gifts and lofty spirit.

In 1841 Lowell published his first collection of poems, entitled *A Year's Life*. The volume was dedicated to "Una," a veiled admission of indebtedness for its inspiration to Miss White. Two poems particularly, *Irene* and *My Love*, and the best in the volume, are rapturous expressions of his new inspiration. In later years he referred to the collection as "poor windfalls of unripe experience." Only nine of the sixty-eight poems were

preserved in subsequent collections. In 1843, with a young friend, Robert Carter, Lowell launched a new magazine, *The Pioneer*, with the high purpose, as the prospectus stated, of giving the public "a rational substitute" for the "namby-pamby love tales and sketches monthly poured out to them by many of our popular magazines." These young reformers did not know how strongly the great reading public is attached to its literary flesh-pots, and so the *Pioneer* proved itself too good to live in just three months. The result of the venture to Lowell was an interesting lesson in editorial work and a debt of eighteen hundred dollars. His next venture was a second volume of *Poems*, issued in 1844, in which the permanent lines of his poetic development appear more clearly than in *A Year's Life*. The tone of the first volume was uniformly serious, but in the second his muse's face begins to brighten with the occasional play of wit and humor. The volume was heartily praised by the critics and his reputation as a new poet of convincing distinction was established. In the following year appeared *Conversations on Some of the Old Poets*, a volume of literary criticism interesting now mainly as pointing to maturer work in this field.

It is generally stated that the influence of Maria White made Lowell an Abolitionist, but this is only qualifiedly true. A year before he had met her he wrote to a friend: "The Abolitionists are the only ones with whom I sympathize of the present extant parties." Freedom, justice, humanitarianism were fundamental to his native idealism. Maria White's enthusiasm and devotion to the cause served to crystallize his sentiments and to stimulate him to a practical participation in the movement. Both wrote for the *Liberty Bell*, an annual published in the interests of the anti-slavery agitation. Immediately after their marriage they went to Philadelphia where Lowell for a time was an editorial writer

for the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, an anti-slavery journal once edited by Whittier. During the next six years he was a regular contributor to the *Anti-Slavery Standard*, published in New York. In all of this prose writing Lowell exhibited the ardent spirit of the reformer, although he never adopted the extreme views of Garrison and others of the ultra-radical wing of the party.

But Lowell's greatest contribution to the anti-slavery cause was the *Biglow Papers*, a series of satirical poems in the Yankee dialect, aimed at the politicians who were responsible for the Mexican War, a war undertaken, as he believed, in the interests of the Southern slaveholders. Hitherto the Abolitionists had been regarded with contempt by the conservative, complacent advocates of peace and "compromise," and to join them was essentially to lose caste in the best society. But now a laughing prophet had arisen whose tongue was tipped with fire. The *Biglow Papers* was an unexpected blow to the slave power. Never before had humor been used directly as a weapon in political warfare. Soon the whole country was ringing with the homely phrases of Hosea Biglow's satiric humor, and deriding conservatism began to change countenance. "No speech, no plea, no appeal," says George William Curtis, "was comparable in popular and permanent effect with this pitiless tempest of fire and hail, in the form of wit, argument, satire, knowledge, insight, learning, common-sense, and patriotism. It was humor of the purest strain, but humor in deadly earnest." As an embodiment of the elemental Yankee character and speech it is a classic of final authority. Says Curtis, "Burns did not give to the Scotch tongue a nobler immortality than Lowell gave to the dialect of New England."

The year 1848 was one of remarkably productive results for Lowell. Besides the *Biglow Papers* and some forty magazine articles and poems, he published a third

collection of *Poems*, the *Vision of Sir Launfal*, and the *Fable for Critics*. The various phases of his composite genius were nearly all represented in these volumes. The *Fable* was a good-natured satire upon his fellow authors, in which he touched up in rollicking rhymed couplets the merits and weaknesses of each, not omitting himself, with witty characterization and acute critical judgment; and it is still read for its delicious humor and sterling criticism. For example, the lines on Poe will always be quoted:

"There comes Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge,
Three-fifths of him genius and two-fifths sheer fudge."

And so the sketch of Hawthorne:

"There is Hawthorne, with genius so shrinking and rare
That you hardly at first see the strength that is there;
A frame so robust, with a nature so sweet,
So earnest, so graceful, so lithe and so fleet,
Is worth a descent from Olympus to meet."

Lowell was now living in happy content at Elmwood. His father, whom he once speaks of as a "Dr. Primrose in the comparative degree," had lost a large portion of his property, and literary journals in those days sent very small checks to young authors. So humble frugality was an attendant upon the high thinking of the poet couple, but this did not matter, since the richest objects of their ideal world could be had without price. But clouds suddenly gathered over their beautiful lives. Four children were born, three of whom died in infancy. Lowell's deep and lasting grief for his first-born is tenderly recorded in the poems *She Came and Went* and the *First Snow-Fall*. The volume of poems published in 1848 was "reverently dedicated" to the memory of "our little Blanche," and in the introductory poem addressed "To

M. W. L." he poured forth his sorrow like a libation of tears:

> "I thought our love at full, but I did err;
> Joy's wreath drooped o'er mine eyes; I could not see
> That sorrow in our happy world must be
> Love's deepest spokesman and interpreter."

The year 1851–52 was spent abroad for the benefit of Mrs. Lowell's health, which was now precarious. At Rome their little son Walter died, and one year after their return to Elmwood sorrow's crown of sorrow came to the poet in the death of Mrs. Lowell, October, 1853. For years after the dear old home was to him *The Dead House*, as he wrote of it:

> "For it died that autumn morning
> When she, its soul, was borne
> To lie all dark on the hillside
> That looks over woodland and corn."

Before 1854 Lowell's literary success had been won mainly in verse. With the appearance in the magazines of *A Moosehead Journal*, *Fireside Travels*, and *Leaves from My Italian Journal* his success as a prose essayist began. Henceforth, and against his will, his prose was a stronger literary force than his poetry. He now gave a course of lectures on the English poets at the Lowell Institute, and during the progress of these lectures he received notice of his appointment to succeed Longfellow in the professorship of the French and Spanish languages and Belles-Lettres in Harvard College. A year was spent in Europe in preparation for his new work, and during the next twenty years he faithfully performed the duties of the professorship, pouring forth the ripening fruits of his varied studies in lectures such as it is not often the privilege of college students to hear. That pulling

in the yoke of this steady occupation was sometimes galling is shown in his private letters. To W. D. Howells he wrote regretfully of the time and energy given to teaching, and of his conviction that he would have been a better poet if he "had not estranged the muse by donning a professor's gown." But a good teacher always bears in his left hand the lamp of sacrifice.

In 1857 Lowell was married to Miss Frances Dunlap, "a woman of remarkable gifts and grace of person and character," says Charles Eliot Norton. In the same year the *Atlantic Monthly* was launched and Lowell became its first editor. This position he held four years. Under his painstaking and wise management the magazine quickly became what it has continued to be, the finest representative of true literature among periodicals. In 1864 he joined his friend, Professor Norton, in the editorship of the *North American Review*, to which he gave much of the distinction for which this periodical was once so worthily famous. In this first appeared his masterly essays on the great poets, Chaucer, Dante, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Dryden, and the others, which were gathered into the three volumes, *Among My Books*, first and second series, and *My Study Windows*. Variety was given to this critical writing by such charming essays as *A Good Word for Winter* and the deliciously caustic paper *On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners*.

One of the strongest elements of Lowell's character was patriotism. His love of country and his native soil was not merely a principle, it was a passion. No American author has done so much to enlarge and exalt the ideals of democracy. An intense interest in the welfare of the nation broadened the scope of his literary work and led him at times into active public life. During the Civil War he published a second series of *Biglow Papers*, in which, says Mr. Greenslet, "we feel the vital stirring of the mind of Lowell as it was moved by the great war:

and if they never had quite the popular reverberation of the first series, they made deeper impression, and are a more priceless possession of our literature." When peace was declared in April, 1865, he wrote to Professor Norton: "The news, my dear Charles, is from Heaven. I felt a strange and tender exaltation. I wanted to laugh and I wanted to cry, and ended by holding my peace and feeling devoutly thankful. There is something magnificent in having a country to love." On July 21 a solemn service was held at Harvard College in memory of her sons who had died in the war, in which Lowell gave the *Commemoration Ode*, a poem which is now regarded, not as popular, but as marking the highest reach of his poetic power. The famous passage characterizing Lincoln is unquestionably the finest tribute ever paid to Lincoln by an American author.

In the presidential campaign of 1876 Lowell was active, making speeches, serving as delegate to the Republican Convention, and later as Presidential Elector. There was even much talk of sending him to Congress. Through the friendly offices of Mr. Howells, who was in intimate personal relations with President Hayes, he was appointed Minister to Spain. This honor was the more gratifying to him because he had long been devoted to the Spanish literature and language, and he could now read his beloved Calderon with new joys. In 1880 he was promoted to the English mission, and during the next four years represented his country at the Court of St. James in a manner that raised him to the highest point of honor and esteem in both nations. His career in England was an extraordinary, in most respects an unparalleled success. He was our first official representative to win completely the heart of the English people, and a great part of his permanent achievement was to establish more cordial relations between the two countries. His literary reputation had prepared the ground

for his personal popularity. He was greeted as "His Excellency the Ambassador of American Literature to the Court of Shakespeare." His fascinating personality won friends in every circle of society. Queen Victoria declared that during her long reign no ambassador had created so much interest or won so much regard. He had already been honored by degrees from Oxford and Cambridge, and now many similar honors were thrust upon him. He was acknowledged to be the best after-dinner speaker in England, and no one was called upon so often for addresses at dedications, the unveiling of tablets, and other civic occasions. It is not strange that he became attached to England with an increasing affection, but there was no diminution of his intense Americanism. His celebrated Birmingham address on *Democracy* is yet our clearest and noblest exposition of American political principles and ideals.

With the inauguration of Cleveland in 1885 Lowell's official residence in England came to an end. He returned to America and for a time lived with his daughter at Deerfoot Farm. Mrs. Lowell had died in England, and he could not carry his sorrow back to Elmwood alone. He now leisurely occupied himself with literary work, making an occasional address upon literature or politics, which was always distinguished by grace and dignity of style and richness of thought.

In November, 1886, he delivered the oration at the 250th anniversary of the founding of Harvard University, and, rising to the requirements of this notable occasion, he captivated his hearers, among whom were many distinguished delegates from the great universities of Europe as well as of America, by the power of his thought and the felicity of his expression.

During the period of his diplomatic service he added almost nothing to his permanent literary product. In 1869 he had published *Under the Willows,* a collection

that contains some of his finest poems. In the same year *The Cathedral* was published, a stately poem in blank verse, profound in thought, with many passages of great poetic beauty. In 1888 a final collection of poems was published, entitled *Heartsease and Rue*, which opened with the memorial poem, *Agassiz*, an elegy that would not be too highly honored by being bound in a golden volume with *Lycidas*, *Adonais* and *Thyrsis*. Going back to his earliest literary studies, he again (1887) lectured at the Lowell Institute on the old dramatists. Occasionally he gave a poem to the magazines and a collection of these *Last Poems* was made in 1895 by Professor Norton. During these years were written many of the charming *Letters* to personal friends, which rank with the finest literary letters ever printed and must always be regarded as an important part of his prose works.

It was a gracious boon of providence that Lowell was permitted to spend his last years at Elmwood, with his daughter, Mrs. Burnett, and his grandchildren. There again, as in the early days, he watched the orioles building their nests and listened to the tricksy catbird's call. To an English friend he writes: "I watch the moon rise behind the same trees through which I first saw it seventy years ago and have a strange feeling of permanence, as if I should watch it seventy years longer." In the old library by the familiar fireplace he sat, when the shadows were playing among his beloved books, communing with the beautiful past. What unwritten poems of pathos and sweetness may have ministered to his great soul we cannot know. In 1890 a fatal disease came upon him, and after long and heroic endurance of pain he died, August 12, 1891, and under the trees of Mt. Auburn he rests, as in life still near his great neighbor Longfellow. In a memorial poem Oliver Wendell Holmes spoke for the thousands who mourned:

"Peace to thy slumber in the forest shade,
Poet and patriot, every gift was thine;
Thy name shall live while summers bloom and fade
And grateful memory guard thy leafy shrine."

Lowell's rich and varied personality presents a type of cultured manhood that is the finest product of American democracy. The largeness of his interests and the versatility of his intellectual powers give him a unique eminence among American authors. His genius was undoubtedly embarrassed by the diffusive tendency of his interests. He might have been a greater poet had he been less the reformer and statesman, and his creative impulses were often absorbed in the mere enjoyment of exercising his critical faculty. Although he achieved only a qualified eminence as poet, or as prose writer, yet because of the breadth and variety of his permanent achievement he must be regarded as our greatest man of letters. His sympathetic interest, always outflowing toward concrete humanity, was a quality—

"With such large range as from the ale-house bench
Can reach the stars and be with both at home."

With marvelous versatility and equal ease he could talk with the down-east farmer and salty seamen and exchange elegant compliments with old world royalty. In *The Cathedral* he says significantly:

"I thank benignant nature most for this,—
A force of sympathy, or call it lack
Of character firm-planted, loosing me
From the pent chamber of habitual self
To dwell enlarged in alien modes of thought,
Haply distasteful, wholesomer for that,
And through imagination to possess,
As they were mine, the lives of other men."

In the delightful little poem, *The Nightingale in the Study*, we have a fanciful expression of the conflict between Lowell's love of books and love of nature. His friend the catbird calls him "out beneath the unmastered sky," where the buttercups "brim with wine beyond all Lesbian juice." But there are ampler skies, he answers, "in Fancy's land," and the singers though dead so long —

> "Give its best sweetness to all song,
> To nature's self her better glory."

His love of reading is manifest in all his work, giving to his style a bookishness that is sometimes excessive and often troublesome. His expression, though generally direct and clear, and happily colored by personal frankness, is often burdened with learning. To be able to read his essays with full appreciation is in itself evidence of a liberal education. His scholarship was broad and profound, but it was not scholarship in the German sense, exhaustive and exhausting. He studied for the joy of knowing, never for the purpose of being known, and he cared more to know the spirit and meaning of things than to know their causes and origins. A language he learned for the sake of its literature rather than its philology. As Mr. Brownell observes, he shows little interest in the large movements of the world's history. He seemed to prefer history as sublimated in the poet's song. The field of *belles-lettres* was his native province; its atmosphere was most congenial to his tastes. In book-land it was always June for him —

> "Springtime ne'er denied
> Indoors by vernal Chaucer, whose fresh woods
> Throb thick with merle and mavis all the year."

But books could never divert his soul from its early endearments with out-of-door nature. "The older I

grow," he says, "the more I am convinced that there are no satisfactions so deep and so permanent as our sympathies with outward nature." And in the preface to *My Study Windows* he speaks of himself as "one who has always found his most fruitful study in the open air." The most charming element of his poetry is the nature element that everywhere cheers and stimulates the reader. It is full of sunshine and bird music. So genuine, spontaneous and sympathetic are his descriptions that we feel the very heart throbs of nature in his verse, and in the prose of such records of intimacies with outdoor friends as the essay, *My Garden Acquaintance*. "How I do love the earth," he exclaims. "I feel it thrill under my feet. I feel somehow as if it were conscious of my love, as if something passed into my dancing blood from it." It is this sensitive nearness to nature that makes him a better interpreter of her "visible forms" than Bryant even; moreover, unlike Bryant he always catches the notes of joy in nature's voices and feels the uplift of a happy inspiration.

In the presence of the immense popularity of Mark Twain, it may seem paradoxical to call Lowell our greatest American humorist. Yet in the refined and artistic qualities of humorous writing and in the genuineness of the native flavor his work is certainly superior to any other humorous writing that is likely to compete with it for permanent interest. Indeed, Mr. Greenslet thinks that "it is as the author of the *Biglow Papers* that he is likely to be longest remembered." The perpetual play of humor gave to his work, even to the last, the freshness of youth. We love him for his boyish love of pure fun. The two large volumes of his *Letters* are delicious reading because he put into them "good wholesome nonsense," as he says, "keeping my seriousness to bore myself with."

But this sparkling and overflowing humor never ob-

scures the deep seriousness that is the undercurrent of all his writing. A high idealism characterizes all his work. One of his greatest services to his country was the effort to create a saner and sounder political life. As he himself realized, he often moralized his work too much with a purposeful idealism. In middle life he said, "I shall never be a poet until I get out of the pulpit, and New England was all meeting-house when I was growing up." In religion and philosophy he was conservative, deprecating the radical and scientific tendencies of the age, with its knife and glass —

> "That make thought physical and thrust far off
> The Heaven, so neighborly with man of old."

The moral impulse and the poetic impulse were often in conflict, and much of his early poetry for this reason was condemned by his later judgment. His maturer poems are filled with deep-thoughted lines, phrases of high aspiration and soul-stirring ecstasies. Though his thought is spiritual and ideal, it is always firmly rooted in the experience of common humanity. All can climb the heights with him and catch inspiring glimpses at least of the ideal and the infinite.

CRITICAL APPRECIATIONS

"The proportion of his poetry that can be so called is small. But a great deal of it is very fine, very noble, and at times very beautiful, and it discloses the distinctly poetic faculty of which rhythmic and figurative is native expression. It is impressionable rather than imaginative in the large sense; it is felicitous in detail rather than in design; and of a general rather than individual, a representative rather than original, inspiration. There is a field of poetry, assuredly not the highest, but

ample and admirable — in which these qualities, more or less unsatisfactory in prose, are legitimately and fruitfully exercised. All poetry is in the realm of feeling, and thus less exclusively dependent on the thought that is the sole reliance of prose. Being genuine poetry, Lowell's profits by this advantage. Feeling is fitly, genuinely, its inspiration. Its range and limitations correspond to the character of his susceptibility, as those of his prose do to that of his thought. The fusion of the two in the crucible of the imagination is infrequent with him, because with him it is the fancy rather than the imagination that is luxuriant and highly developed. For the architectonics of poetry he had not the requisite reach and grasp, the comprehensive and constructing vision. Nothing of his has any large design or effective interdependent proportions. In a technical way an exception should be noted in his skilful building of the ode — a form in which he was extremely successful and for which he evidently had a native aptitude. . . . Lowell's constitutes, on the whole, the most admirable American contribution to the nature poetry of English literature — far beyond that of Bryant, Whittier, or Longfellow, I think, and only occasionally excelled here and there by the magic touch of Emerson." — *W. C. Brownell,* in *Scribner's Magazine, February,* 1907.

"Lowell is a poet who seems to represent New England more variously than either of his comrades. We find in his work, as in theirs, her loyalty and moral purpose. She has been at cost for his training, and he in turn has read her heart, honoring her as a mother before the world, and seeing beauty in her common garb and speech. . . . If Lowell be not first of all an original genius, I know not where to look for one. Judged by his personal bearing, who is brighter, more persuasive, more equal to the occasion than himself, — less open to Doudan's

stricture upon writers who hoard and store up their thoughts for the betterment of their printed works? Lowell's treasury can stand the drafts of both speech and composition. Judged by his works, as a poet in the end must be, he is one who might gain by revision and compression. But think, as is his due, upon the high-water marks of his abundant tide, and see how enviable the record of a poet who is our most brilliant and learned critic, and who has given us our best native idyll, our best and most complete work in dialectic verse, and the noblest heroic ode that America has produced — each and all ranking with the first of their kinds in English literature of the modern time." — *Edmund Clarence Stedman.*

As a racy humorist and a brilliant wit using verse as an instrument of expression, he has no clear superior, probably no equal, so far at least as American readers are concerned, among writers who have employed the English language. As a satirist he has superiors, but scarcely as an inventor of *jeux d'esprit.* As a patriotic lyrist he has few equals and very few superiors in what is probably the highest function of such a poet — that of stimulating to a noble height the national instincts of his countrymen. . . . The rest of his poetry may fairly be said to gain on that of any of his American contemporaries save Poe in more sensuous rhythm, in choicer diction, in a more refined and subtilized imagination, and in a deeper, a more brooding intelligence." — *Prof. William P. Trent.*

"In originality, in virility, in many-sidedness, Lowell is the first of American poets. He not only possessed, at times in nearly equal measure, many of the qualities most notable in his fellow-poets, rivaling Bryant as a painter of nature, and Holmes in pathos, having

a touch too of Emerson's transcendentalism, and rising occasionally to Whittier's moral fervor, but he brought to all this much beside. In one vein he produced such a masterpiece of mingled pathos and nature painting as we find in the tenth Biglow letter of the second series; in another, such a lyric gem as *The Fountain;* in another, *The First Snow-Fall* and *After the Burial;* in another, again, the noble *Harvard Commemoration Ode.* . . . He had plainly a most defective ear for rhythm and verbal harmony. Except when he confines himself to simple metres, we rarely find five consecutive lines which do not in some way jar on us. His blank verse and the irregular metres which he, unfortunately, so often employs, have little or no music, and are often quite intolerable. But after all the deductions which the most exacting criticism can make, it still remains that, as a serious poet Lowell stands high. As a painter of nature, he has, when at his best, few superiors, and, in his own country, none. Whatever be their esthetic and technical deficiencies, he has written many poems of sentiment and pathos which can never fail to come home to all to whom such poetry appeals. His hortatory and didactic poetry, as it expresses itself in the *Commemoration Ode,* is worthy, if not of the music and felicity of Milton and Wordsworth, at least of their tone, when that tone is most exalted. As a humorist he is inimitable. His humor is rooted in a fine sense of the becoming, and in a profounder insight into the character of his countrymen than that of any other American writer." — *John Churton Collins.*

"He was a brilliant wit and a delightful humorist; a discursive essayist of unfailing charm; the best American critic of his time; a scholar of wide learning, deep also when his interest was most engaged; a powerful writer on great public questions; a patriot passionately pure; but first, last, and always he was a poet, never so

happy as when he was looking at the world from the poet's mount of vision and seeking for fit words and musical to tell what he had seen. But his emotion was not sufficiently 'recollected in tranquillity.' Had he been more an artist he would have been a better poet, for then he would have challenged the invasions of his literary memory, his humor, his animal spirits, within limits where they had no right of way. If his humor was his rarest, it was his most dangerous gift; so often did it tempt him to laugh out in some holy place. . . . Less charming than Longfellow, less homely than Whittier, less artistic than Holmes, less grave than Bryant, less vivid than Emerson, less unique than Poe, his qualities, intellectual, moral and esthetic, in their assemblage and coördination assign him to a place among American men of letters which is only a little lower than that which is Emerson's and his alone." — *John White Chadwick.*

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL

Early in 1848 in a letter to his friend Briggs, Lowell speaks of *The Vision of Sir Launfal* as "a sort of story, and more likely to be popular than what I write generally. Maria thinks very highly of it." And in another letter he calls it "a little narrative poem." In December, 1848, it was published in a thin volume alone, and at once justified the poet's expectations of popularity. The poem was an improvisation, like that of his "musing organist," for it was written, we are told, almost at a single sitting, entirely within two days. The theme may have been suggested by Tennyson's *Sir Galahad,* but his familiarity with the old romances and his love of the mystical and symbolic sense of these good old-time tales were a quite ample source for such suggestion. Moreover Lowell in his early years was much given to seeing

visions and dreaming dreams. "During that part of my life," he says, "which I lived most alone, I was never a single night unvisited by visions, and once I thought I had a personal revelation from God Himself." The *Fairy Queen* was "the first poem I ever read," he says, and the bosky glades of Elmwood were often transformed into an enchanted forest where the Knight of the Red Cross, and Una and others in medieval costume passed up and down before his wondering eyes. This medieval romanticism was a perfectly natural accompaniment of his intense idealism.

The Vision of Sir Launfal and the *Fable for Critics*, published in the same year, illustrate the two dominant and strikingly contrasted qualities of his nature, a contrast of opposites which he himself clearly perceived. "I find myself very curiously compounded of two utterly distinct characters. One half of me is clear mystic and enthusiast, and the other, humorist," and he adds that "it would have taken very little to have made a Saint Francis" of him. It was the Saint Francis of New England, the moral and spiritual enthusiast in Lowell's nature that produced the poem and gave it power. Thus we see that notwithstanding its antique style and artificial structure, it was a perfectly direct and spontaneous expression of himself.

The allegory of the *Vision* is easily interpreted, in its main significance. There is nothing original in the lesson, the humility of true charity, and it is a common criticism that the moral purpose of the poem is lost sight of in the beautiful nature pictures. But a knowledge of the events which were commanding Lowell's attention at this time and quickening his native feelings into purposeful utterance gives to the poem a much deeper significance. In 1844, when the discussion over the annexation of Texas was going on, he wrote *The Present Crisis*, a noble appeal to his countrymen to im-

prove and elevate their principles. During the next four years he was writing editorially for the *Standard*, the official organ of the Anti-Slavery Society, at the same time he was bringing out the *Biglow Papers*. In all these forms of expression he voiced constantly the sentiment of reform, which now filled his heart like a holy zeal. The national disgrace of slavery rested heavily upon his soul. He burned with the desire to make God's justice prevail where man's justice had failed. In 1846 he said in a letter, "It seems as if my heart would break in pouring out one glorious song that should be the gospel of Reform, full of consolation and strength to the oppressed, yet falling gently and restoringly as dew on the withered youth-flowers of the oppressor. That way my madness lies, if any." This passionate yearning for reform is embodied poetically in the *Vision*. In a broad sense, therefore, the poem is an expression of ideal democracy, in which equality, sympathy, and a sense of the common brotherhood of man are the basis of all ethical actions and standards. It is the Christ-like conception of human society that is always so alluring in the poetry and so discouraging in the prose of life.

The following explanation appeared in the early editions of the poem as an introductory note:

"According to the mythology of the Romancers, the San Greal, or Holy Grail, was the cup out of which Jesus Christ partook of the last supper with his disciples. It was brought into England by Joseph of Arimathea, and remained there, an object of pilgrimage and adoration, for many years in the keeping of his lineal descendants. It was incumbent upon those who had charge of it to be chaste in thought, word, and deed; but, one of the keepers having broken this condition, the Holy Grail disappeared. From that time it was a favorite enterprise of the Knights of Arthur's court to go in search of it. Sir Galahad was at last successful in finding

it, as may be read in the seventeenth book of the Romance of King Arthur. Tennyson has made Sir Galahad the subject of one of the most exquisite of his poems.

"The plot (if I may give that name to anything so slight) of the following poem is my own, and, to serve its purposes, I have enlarged the circle of competition in search of the miraculous cup in such a manner as to include not only other persons than the heroes of the Round Table, but also a period of time subsequent to the date of King Arthur's reign."

In the last sentence there is a sly suggestion of Lowell's playfulness. Of course every one may compete in the search for the Grail, and the "time subsequent to King Arthur's reign" includes the present time. The Romance of King Arthur is the *Morte Darthur* of Sir Thomas Malory. Lowell's specific indebtedness to the medieval romances extended only to the use of the symbol of consecration to some noble purpose in the search for the Grail, and to the name of his hero. It is a free version of older French romances belonging to the Arthurian cycle. *Sir Launfal* is the title of a poem written by Sir Thomas Chestre in the reign of Henry VI, which may be found in Ritson's *Ancient English Metrical Romances*. There is nothing suggestive of Lowell's poem except the quality of generosity in the hero, who —

> "gaf gyftys largelyche,
> Gold and sylver; and clodes ryche,
> To squyer and to knight."

One of Lowell's earlier poems, *The Search*, contains the germ of *The Vision of Sir Launfal*. It represents a search for Christ, first in nature's fair woods and fields, then in the "proud world" amid "power and wealth," and the search finally ends in "a hovel rude" where —

"The King I sought for meekly stood;
A naked, hungry child
Clung round his gracious knee,
And a poor hunted slave looked up and smiled
To bless the smile that set him free."

And Christ, the seeker learns, is not to be found by wandering through the world.

His throne is with the outcast and the weak."

A similar fancy also is embodied in a little poem entitled *A Parable*. Christ goes through the world to see "How the men, my brethren, believe in me," and he finds "in church, and palace, and judgment-hall," a disregard for the primary principles of his teaching.

"Have ye founded your throne and altars, then,
On the bodies and souls of living men?
And think ye that building shall endure,
Which shelters the noble and crushes the poor?"

These early poems and passages in others written at about the same time, taken in connection with the *Vision*, show how strongly the theme had seized upon Lowell's mind.

The structure of the poem is complicated and sometimes confusing. At the outset the student must notice that there is a story within a story. The action of the major story covers only a single night, and the hero of this story is the real Sir Launfal, who in his sleep dreams the minor story, the Vision. The action of this story covers the lifetime of the hero, the imaginary Sir Launfal, from early manhood to old age, and includes his wanderings in distant lands. The poem is constructed on the principles of contrast and parallelism. By holding to this method of structure throughout Lowell sacrificed the important artistic element of unity, especially

in breaking the narrative with the Prelude to the second part. The first Prelude describing the beauty and inspiring joy of spring, typifying the buoyant youth and aspiring soul of Sir Launfal, corresponds to the second Prelude, describing the bleakness and desolation of winter, typifying the old age and desolated life of the hero. But beneath the surface of this wintry age there is a new soul of summer beauty, the warm love of suffering humanity, just as beneath the surface of the frozen brook there is an ice-palace of summer beauty. In Part First the gloomy castle with its joyless interior stands as the only cold and forbidding thing in the landscape, "like an outpost of winter;" so in Part Second the same castle with Christmas joys within is the only bright and gladsome object in the landscape. In Part First the castle gates never "might opened be"; in Part Second the "castle gates stand open now." And thus the student may find various details contrasted and paralleled. The symbolic meaning must be kept constantly in mind, or it will escape unobserved; for example, the cost of earthly things in comparison with the generosity of June corresponds to the churlish castle opposed to the inviting warmth of summer; and each symbolizes the proud, selfish, misguided heart of Sir Launfal in youth, in comparison with the humility and large Christian charity in old age. The student should search for these symbolic hints, passages in which "more is meant than meets the ear," but if he does not find all that the poet may or may not have intended in his dreamy design, there need be no detraction from the enjoyment of the poem.

Critical judgment upon *The Vision of Sir Launfal* is generally severe in respect to its structural faults. Mr. Greenslet declares that "through half a century, nine readers out of ten have mistaken Lowell's meaning," even the "numerous commentators" have "interpreted

the poem as if the young knight actually adventured the quest and returned from it at the end of years, broken and old." This, however, must be regarded as a rather exaggerated estimate of the lack of unity and consistency in the poem. Stedman says: "I think that *The Vision of Sir Launfal* owed its success quite as much to a presentation of nature as to its misty legend. It really is a landscape poem, of which the lovely passage, 'And what is so rare as a day in June?' and the wintry prelude to Part Second, are the specific features." And the English critic, J. Churton Collins, thinks that "*Sir Launfal*, except for the beautiful nature pictures, scarcely rises above the level of an Ingoldsby Legend."

The popular judgment of the poem (which after all is the important judgment) is fairly stated by Mr. Greenslet: "There is probably no poem in American literature in which a visionary faculty like that [of Lowell] is expressed with such a firm command of poetic background and variety of music as in *Sir Launfal* . . . its structure is far from perfect; yet for all that it has stood the searching test of time; it is beloved now by thousands of young American readers, for whom it has been a first initiation to the beauty of poetic idealism."

While studying *The Vision of Sir Launfal* the student should be made familiar with Tennyson's *Sir Galahad* and *The Holy Grail*, and the libretto of Wagner's *Parsifal*. Also Henry A. Abbey's magnificent series of mural paintings in the Boston Public Library, representing the Quest of the Holy Grail, may be utilized in the *Copley Prints*. If possible the story of Sir Galahad's search for the Grail in the seventeenth book of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* should be read. It would be well also to read Longfellow's *King Robert of Sicily*, which to some extent presents a likeness of motive and treatment.

THE COMMEMORATION ODE

In April, 1865, the Civil War was ended and peace was declared. On July 21 Harvard College held a solemn service in commemoration of her ninety-three sons who had been killed in the war. Eight of these fallen young heroes were of Lowell's own kindred. Personal grief thus added intensity to the deep passion of his utterance upon this great occasion. He was invited to give a poem, and the ode which he presented proved to be the supreme event of the noble service. The scene is thus described by Francis H. Underwood, who was in the audience:

"The services took place in the open air, in the presence of a great assembly. Prominent among the speakers were Major-General Meade, the hero of Gettysburg, and Major-General Devens. The wounds of the war were still fresh and bleeding, and the interest of the occasion was deep and thrilling. The summer afternoon was drawing to its close when the poet began the recital of the ode. No living audience could for the first time follow with intelligent appreciation the delivery of such a poem. To be sure, it had its obvious strong points and its sonorous charms; but, like all the later poems of the author, it is full of condensed thought and requires study. The reader to-day finds many passages whose force and beauty escaped him during the recital, but the effect of the poem at the time was overpowering. The face of the poet, always singularly expressive, was on this occasion almost transfigured — glowing, as if with an inward light. It was impossible to look away from it. Our age has furnished many great historic scenes, but this Commemoration combined the elements of grandeur and pathos, and produced an impression as lasting as life."

Of the delivery and immediate effect of the poem Mr.

Greenslet says: "Some in the audience were thrilled and shaken by it, as Lowell himself was shaken in its delivery, yet he seems to have felt with some reason that it was not a complete and immediate success. Nor is this cause for wonder. The passion of the poem was too ideal, its woven harmonies too subtle to be readily communicated to so large an audience, mastered and mellowed though it was by a single deep mood. Nor was Lowell's elocution quite that of the deep-mouthed odist capable of interpreting such organ tones of verse. But no sooner was the poem published, with the matchless Lincoln strophe inserted, than its greatness and nobility were manifest."

The circumstances connected with the writing of the ode have been described by Lowell in his private letters. It appears that he was reluctant to undertake the task, and for several weeks his mind utterly refused to respond to the high duty put upon it. At last the sublime thought came to him upon the swift wings of inspiration. "The ode itself," he says, "was an improvisation. Two days before the commemoration I had told my friend Child that it was impossible — that I was dull as a door-mat. But the next day something gave me a jog, and the whole thing came out of me with a rush. I sat up all night writing it out clear, and took it on the morning of the day to Child." In another letter he says: "The poem was written with a vehement speed, which I thought I had lost in the skirts of my professor's gown. Till within two days of the celebration I was hopelessly dumb, and then it all came with a rush, literally making me lean (mi fece magro), and so nervous that I was weeks in getting over it." In a note in Scudder's biography of Lowell (Vol. II., p. 65), it is stated upon the authority of Mrs. Lowell that the poem was begun at ten o'clock the night before the commemoration day, and finished at four o'clock in the morning. "She opened her eyes

to see him standing haggard, actually wasted by the stress of labor and the excitement which had carried him through a poem full of passion and fire, of five hundred and twenty-three lines, in the space of six hours."

Critical estimates are essentially in accord as to the deep significance and permanent poetic worth of this poem. Greenslet, the latest biographer of Lowell, says that the ode, "if not his most perfect, is surely his noblest and most splendid work," and adds: "Until the dream of human brotherhood is forgotten, the echo of its large music will not wholly die away." Professor Beers declares it to be, "although uneven, one of the finest occasional poems in the language, and the most important contribution which our Civil War has made to song." Of its exalted patriotism, George William Curtis says: "The patriotic heart of America throbs forever in Lincoln's Gettysburg address. But nowhere in literature is there a more magnificent and majestic personification of a country whose name is sacred to its children, nowhere a profounder passion of patriotic loyalty, than in the closing lines of the Commemoration Ode. The American whose heart, swayed by that lofty music, does not thrill and palpitate with solemn joy and high resolve does not yet know what it is to be an American."

With the praise of a discriminating criticism Stedman discusses the ode in his *Poets of America:* "Another poet would have composed a less unequal ode; no American could have glorified it with braver passages, with whiter heat, with language and imagery so befitting impassioned thought. Tried by the rule that a true poet is at his best with the greatest theme, Lowell's strength is indisputable. The ode is no smooth-cut verse from Pentelicus, but a mass of rugged quartz, beautiful with prismatic crystals, and deep veined here and there with virgin gold. The early strophes, though opening with a fine abrupt line, 'weak-winged is song,' are scarcely

firm and incisive. Lowell had to work up to his theme. In the third division, 'Many loved Truth, and lavished life's best oil,' he struck upon a new and musical intonation of the tenderest thoughts. The quaver of this melodious interlude carries the ode along, until the great strophe is reached, —

'Such was he, our Martyr-Chief,'

in which the man, Abraham Lincoln, whose death had but just closed the national tragedy, is delineated in a manner that gives this poet a preëminence, among those who capture likeness in enduring verse, that we award to Velasquez among those who fasten it upon the canvas. 'One of Plutarch's men' is before us, face to face; an historic character whom Lowell fully comprehended, and to whose height he reached in this great strophe. Scarcely less fine is his tearful, yet transfiguring, Avete to the sacred dead of the Commemoration. The weaker divisions of the production furnish a background to these passages, and at the close the poet rises with the invocation, —

'Bow down, dear Land, for thou hast found release!'

a strain which shows that when Lowell determinedly sets his mouth to the trumpet, the blast is that of Roncesvalles."

W. C. Brownell, the latest critic of Lowell's poetry, says of this poem: "The ode is too long, its evolution is defective, it contains verbiage, it preaches. But passages of it — the most famous having characteristically been interpolated after its delivery — are equal to anything of the kind. The temptation to quote from it is hard to withstand. It is the cap-sheaf of Lowell's achievement." In this ode "he reaches, if he does not throughout maintain, his own 'clear-ethered height' and his

verse has the elevation of ecstasy and the splendor of the sublime."

The versification of this poem should be studied with some particularity. Of the forms of lyric expression the ode is the most elaborate and dignified. It is adapted only to lofty themes and stately occasions. Great liberty is allowed in the choice and arrangement of its meter, rhymes, and stanzaic forms, that its varied form and movement may follow the changing phases of the sentiment and passion called forth by the theme. Lowell has given us an account of his own consideration of this matter. "My problem," he says, "was to contrive a measure which should not be tedious by uniformity, which should vary with varying moods, in which the transitions (including those of the voice) should be managed without jar. I at first thought of mixed rhymed and blank verses of unequal measures, like those in the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*, which are in the main masterly. Of course, Milton deliberately departed from that stricter form of Greek chorus to which it was bound quite as much (I suspect) by the law of its musical accompaniment as by any sense of symmetry. I wrote some stanzas of the *Commemoration Ode* on this theory at first, leaving some verses without a rhyme to match. But my ear was better pleased when the rhyme, coming at a longer interval, as a far-off echo rather than instant reverberation, produced the same effect almost, and yet was gratified by unexpectedly recalling an association and faint reminiscence of consonance."

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THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL

And Other Poems

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL

Prelude to Part First

Over his keys the musing organist,
  Beginning doubtfully and far away,
First lets his fingers wander as they list,
  And builds a bridge from Dreamland for his lay:
Then, as the touch of his loved instrument
  Gives hope and fervor, nearer draws his theme,
First guessed by faint auroral flushes sent
  Along the wavering vista of his dream.

Not only around our infancy
Doth heaven with all its splendors lie;
Daily, with souls that cringe and plot,
We Sinais climb and know it not.

Over our manhood bend the skies;
Against our fallen and traitor lives
The great winds utter prophecies;
With our faint hearts the mountain strives;
Its arms outstretched, the druid wood
Waits with its benedicite;
And to our age's drowsy blood
Still shouts the inspiring sea.

Earth gets its price for what Earth gives us.
The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in,
The priest hath his fee who comes and shrives us,
We bargain for the graves we lie in;
At the Devil's booth are all things sold,
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;
For a cap and bells our lives we pay,
Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking
'T is heaven alone that is given away,
'T is only God may be had for the asking;
No price is set on the lavish summer;
June may be had by the poorest comer.

And what is so rare as a day in June?
Then, if ever, come perfect days;

Then Heaven tries the earth if it be in tune,
And over it softly her warm ear lays:
Whether we look, or whether we listen,
We hear life murmur, or see it glisten;
Every clod feels a stir of might,
An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
And, groping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers;
The flush of life may well be seen
Thrilling back over hills and valleys;
The cowslip startles in meadows green,
The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice,
And there's never a leaf nor a blade too mean
To be some happy creature's palace;
The little bird sits at his door in the sun,
Atilt like a blossom among the leaves,
And lets his illumined being o'errun
With the deluge of summer it receives;
His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,
And the heart in her dumb breast flutters and sings;
He sings to the wide world, and she to her nest, —

In the nice ear of Nature which song is the best?

Now is the high-tide of the year,
And whatever of life hath ebbed away
Comes flooding back, with a ripply cheer,
Into every bare inlet and creek and bay;
Now the heart is so full that a drop overfills it,
We are happy now because God wills it;
No matter how barren the past may have been,
'T is enough for us now that the leaves are green;
We sit in the warm shade and feel right well
How the sap creeps up and the blossoms swell,
We may shut our eyes, but we cannot help knowing
That skies are clear and grass is growing;
The breeze comes whispering in our ear
That dandelions are blossoming near,
That maize has sprouted, that streams are flowing,
That the river is bluer than the sky,
That the robin is plastering his house hard by;
And if the breeze kept the good news back,

For other couriers we should not lack;
We could guess it all by yon heifer's lowing, —
And hark! how clear bold chanticleer,
Warmed with the new wine of the year,
Tells all in his lusty crowing!

Joy comes, grief goes, we know not how;
Everything is happy now,
Everything is upward striving;
'T is as easy now for the heart to be true
As for grass to be green or skies to be blue, —
'T is the natural way of living:
Who knows whither the clouds have fled?
In the unscarred heaven they leave no wake;
And the eyes forget the tears they have shed,
The heart forgets its sorrow and ache;
The soul partakes the season's youth,
And the sulphurous rifts of passion and woe
Lie deep 'neath a silence pure and smooth,
Like burnt-out craters healed with snow.
What wonder if Sir Launfal now
Remembered the keeping of his vow?

Part First

I

"My golden spurs now bring to me,
And bring to me my richest mail,
For to-morrow I go over land and sea
In search of the Holy Grail;
Shall never a bed for me be spread,
Nor shall a pillow be under my head,
Till I begin my vow to keep;
Here on the rushes will I sleep,
And perchance there may come a vision true
Ere day create the world anew."
Slowly Sir Launfal's eyes grew dim,
Slumber fell like a cloud on him,
And into his soul the vision flew.

II

The crows flapped over by twos and threes,
In the pool drowsed the cattle up to their knees,
The little birds sang as if it were
The one day of summer in all the year,

And the very leaves seemed to sing on the trees:
The castle alone in the landscape lay
Like an outpost of winter, dull and gray;
'T was the proudest hall in the North Countree,
And never its gates might opened be,
Save to lord or lady of high degree;
Summer besieged it on every side,
But the churlish stone her assaults defied;
She could not scale the chilly wall,
Though around it for leagues her pavilions tall
Stretched left and right,
Over the hills and out of sight;
Green and broad was every tent,
And out of each a murmur went
Till the breeze fell off at night.

II

The drawbridge dropped with a surly clang,
And through the dark arch a charger sprang,
Bearing Sir Launfal, the maiden knight,
In his gilded mail, that flamed so bright
It seemed the dark castle had gathered all

Those shafts the fierce sun had shot over its wall
In his siege of three hundred summers long,
And, binding them all in one blazing sheaf,
Had cast them forth: so, young and strong,
And lightsome as a locust leaf,
Sir Launfal flashed forth in his maiden mail,
To seek in all climes for the Holy Grail.

IV

It was morning on hill and stream and tree,
And morning in the young knight's heart;
Only the castle moodily
Rebuffed the gifts of the sunshine free,
And gloomed by itself apart;
The season brimmed all other things up
Full as the rain fills the pitcher-plant's cup.

V

As Sir Launfal made morn through the darksome gate,
He was 'ware of a leper, crouched by the same,

Who begged with his hand and moaned as he
sate;
And a loathing over Sir Launfal came,
The sunshine went out of his soul with a thrill,
The flesh 'neath his armor 'gan shrink and
crawl,
And midway its leap his heart stood still
Like a frozen waterfall;
For this man, so foul and bent of stature,
Rasped harshly against his dainty nature,
And seemed the one blot on the summer
morn, —
So he tossed him a piece of gold in scorn.

VI

The leper raised not the gold from the dust:
"Better to me the poor man's crust,
Better the blessing of the poor,
Though I turn me empty from his door;
That is no true alms which the hand can
hold;
He gives only the worthless gold
Who gives from a sense of duty;
But he who gives a slender mite,

And gives to that which is out of sight,
That thread of the all-sustaining Beauty
Which runs through all and doth all unite, —
The hand cannot clasp the whole of his alms,
The heart outstretches its eager palms,
For a god goes with it and makes it store
To the soul that was starving in darkness before."

Prelude to Part Second

Down swept the chill wind from the mountain peak,
From the snow five thousand summers old;
On open wold and hill-top bleak
It had gathered all the cold,
And whirled it like sleet on the wanderer's cheek;
It carried a shiver everywhere
From the unleafed boughs and pastures bare;
The little brook heard it and built a roof
'Neath which he could house him, winter-proof;
All night by the white stars' frosty gleams
He groined his arches and matched his beams;

Slender and clear were his crystal spars
As the lashes of light that trim the stars;
He sculptured every summer delight
In his halls and chambers out of sight;
Sometimes his tinkling waters slipt
Down through a frost-leaved forest-crypt,
Long, sparkling aisles of steel-stemmed trees
Bending to counterfeit a breeze;
Sometimes the roof no fretwork knew
But silvery mosses that downward grew;
Sometimes it was carved in sharp relief
With quaint arabesques of ice-fern leaf;
Sometimes it was simply smooth and clear
For the gladness of heaven to shine through, and here
He had caught the nodding bulrush-tops
And hung them thickly with diamond-drops,
That crystalled the beams of moon and sun,
And made a star of every one:
No mortal builder's most rare device
Could match this winter-palace of ice;
'T was as if every image that mirrored lay
In his depths serene through the summer day,
Each fleeting shadow of earth and sky,

Lest the happy model should be lost,
Had been mimicked in fairy masonry
By the elfin builders of the frost.

Within the hall are song and laughter,
The cheeks of Christmas glow red and jolly,
And sprouting is every corbel and rafter
With lightsome green of ivy and holly;
Through the deep gulf of the chimney wide
Wallows the Yule-log's roaring tide;
The broad flame-pennons droop and flap
And belly and tug as a flag in the wind;
Like a locust shrills the imprisoned sap,
Hunted to death in its galleries blind;
And swift little troops of silent sparks,
Now pausing, now scattering away as in fear,
Go threading the soot-forest's tangled darks
Like herds of startled deer.

But the wind without was eager and sharp,
Of Sir Launfal's gray hair it makes a harp,
And rattles and wrings
The icy strings,

Singing, in dreary monotone,
A Christmas carol of its own,
Whose burden still, as he might guess,
Was — "Shelterless, shelterless, shelterless!"

The voice of the seneschal flared like a torch
As he shouted the wanderer away from the porch,
And he sat in the gateway and saw all night
The great hall-fire, so cheery and bold,
Through the window-slits of the castle old,
Build out its piers of ruddy light
Against the drift of the cold.

Part Second

I

There was never a leaf on bush or tree,
The bare boughs rattled shudderingly;
The river was dumb and could not speak,
For the weaver Winter its shroud had spun,
A single crow on the tree-top bleak
From his shining feathers shed off the cold sun;

Again it was morning, but shrunk and cold,
As if her veins were sapless and old,
And she rose up decrepitly
For a last dim look at earth and sea.

II

Sir Launfal turned from his own hard gate,
For another heir in his earldom sate;
An old, bent man, worn out and frail,
He came back from seeking the Holy Grail;
Little he reeked of his earldom's loss,
No more on his surcoat was blazoned the cross,
But deep in his soul the sign he wore,
The badge of the suffering and the poor.

III

Sir Launfal's raiment thin and spare
Was idle mail 'gainst the barbed air,
For it was just at the Christmas time;
So he mused, as he sat, of a sunnier clime,
And sought for a shelter from cold and snow
In the light and warmth of long ago;
He sees the snake-like caravan crawl

O'er the edge of the desert, black and small,
Then nearer and nearer, till, one by one,
He can count the camels in the sun,
As over the red-hot sands they pass
To where, in its slender necklace of grass,
The little spring laughed and leapt in the shade,
And with its own self like an infant played,
And waved its signal of palms.

IV

"For Christ's sweet sake, I beg an alms;"
The happy camels may reach the spring,
But Sir Launfal sees only the grewsome thing,
The leper, lank as the rain-blanched bone,
That cowers beside him, a thing as lone
And white as the ice-isles of Northern seas
In the desolate horror of his disease.

V

And Sir Launfal said, — "I behold in thee
An image of Him who died on the tree;
Thou also hast had thy crown of thorns,
Thou also hast had the world's buffets and scorns, —

And to thy life were not denied
The wounds in the hands and feet and side:
Mild Mary's Son, acknowledge me;
Behold, through him, I give to thee!"

VI

Then the soul of the leper stood up in his eyes
And looked at Sir Launfal, and straightway he
Remembered in what a haughtier guise
He had flung an alms to leprosie,
When he girt his young life up in gilded mail
And set forth in search of the Holy Grail.
The heart within him was ashes and dust;
He parted in twain his single crust,
He broke the ice on the streamlet's brink,
And gave the leper to eat and drink;
'T was a moldy crust of coarse brown bread,
'T was water out of a wooden bowl, —
Yet with fine wheaten bread was the leper fed,
And 't was red wine he drank with his thirsty soul.

VII

As Sir Launfal mused with a downcast face,
A light shone round about the place;
The leper no longer crouched at his side,
But stood before him glorified,
Shining and tall and fair and straight
As the pillar that stood by the Beautiful Gate, —
Himself the Gate whereby men can
Enter the temple of God in Man.

VIII

His words were shed softer than leaves from the pine,
And they fell on Sir Launfal as snows on the brine,
That mingle their softness and quiet in one
With the shaggy unrest they float down upon;
And the voice that was softer than silence said,
"Lo, it is I, be not afraid!
In many climes, without avail,
Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail;

Behold, it is here, — this cup which thou
Didst fill at the streamlet for me but now;
This crust is my body broken for thee,
This water his blood that died on the tree;
The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,
In whatso we share with another's need, —
Not what we give, but what we share, —
For the gift without the giver is bare;
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three, —
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me."

IX

Sir Launfal awoke as from a swound: —
"The Grail in my castle here is found!
Hang my idle armor up on the wall,
Let it be the spider's banquet-hall;
He must be fenced with stronger mail
Who would seek and find the Holy Grail."

X

The castle gate stands open now,
And the wanderer is welcome to the hall
As the hangbird is to the elm-tree bough;
No longer scowl the turrets tall,
The Summer's long siege at last is o'er:

When the first poor outcast went in at the door.
She entered with him in disguise,
And mastered the fortress by surprise;
There is no spot she loves so well on ground,
She lingers and smiles there the whole year round;
The meanest serf on Sir Launfal's land
Has hall and bower at his command;
And there's no poor man in the North Countree
But is lord of the earldom as much as he.

THE SHEPHERD OF KING ADMETUS

There came a youth upon the earth,
Some thousand years ago,
Whose slender hands were nothing worth,
Whether to plow, or reap, or sow.

He made a lyre, and drew therefrom
Music so strange and rich,
That all men loved to hear, — and some
Muttered of fagots for a witch.

But King Admetus, one who had
Pure taste by right divine,

Decreed his singing not too bad
To hear between the cups of wine

And so, well pleased with being soothed
Into a sweet half-sleep,
Three times his kingly beard he smoothed
And made him viceroy o'er his sheep.

His words were simple words enough,
And yet he used them so,
That what in other mouths were rough
In his seemed musical and low.

Men called him but a shiftless youth,
In whom no good they saw;
And yet, unwittingly, in truth,
They made his careless words their law.

They knew not how he learned at all,
For, long hour after hour,
He sat and watched the dead leaves fall,
Or mused upon a common flower.

It seemed the loveliness of things
Did teach him all their use,

For, in mere weeds, and stones, and springs,
He found a healing power profuse.

Men granted that his speech was wise,
But, when a glance they caught
Of his slim grace and woman's eyes,
They laughed, and called him good-for-naught.

Yet after he was dead and gone,
And e'en his memory dim,
Earth seemed more sweet to live upon,
More full of love, because of him.

And day by day more holy grew
Each spot where he had trod,
Till after-poets only knew
Their first-born brother as a god.

AN INCIDENT IN A RAILROAD CAR

He spoke of Burns: men rude and rough
Pressed round to hear the praise of one
Whose heart was made of manly, simple, stuff,
As homespun as their own.

And, when he read, they forward leaned,
Drinking, with eager hearts and ears,
His brook-like songs whom glory never weaned
From humble smiles and tears.

Slowly there grew a tender awe,
Sunlike, o'er faces brown and hard,
As if in him who read they felt and saw
Some presence of the bard.

It was a sight for sin and wrong
And slavish tyranny to see,
A sight to make our faith more pure and strong
In high humanity.

I thought, these men will carry hence
Promptings their former life above,
And something of a finer reverence
For beauty, truth, and love.

God scatters love on every side,
Freely among his children all,
And always hearts are lying open wide,
Wherein some grains may fall.

There is no wind but soweth seeds
Of a more true and open life,
Which burst unlooked for, into high-souled deeds,
With wayside beauty rife.

We find within these souls of ours
Some wild germs of a higher birth,
Which in the poet's tropic heart bear flowers
Whose fragrance fills the earth.

Within the hearts of all men lie
These promises of wider bliss,
Which blossom into hopes that cannot die,
In sunny hours like this.

All that hath been majestical
In life or death, since time began,
Is native in the simple heart of all,
The angel heart of man.

And thus, among the untaught poor,
Great deeds and feelings find a home,
That cast in shadow all the golden lore
Of classic Greece and Rome.

O, mighty brother-soul of man,
Where'er thou art, in low or high,
Thy skyey arches with exulting span
O'er-roof infinity!

All thoughts that mould the age begin
Deep down within the primitive soul,
And from the many slowly upward win
To one who grasps the whole.

In his wide brain the feeling deep
That struggled on the many's tongue
Swells to a tide of thought, whose surges leap
O'er the weak thrones of wrong.

All thought begins in feeling, — wide
In the great mass its base is hid,
And, narrowing up to thought, stands glorified,
A moveless pyramid.

Nor is he far astray, who deems
That every hope, which rises and grows broad

In the world's heart, by ordered impulse streams
From the great heart of God.

God wills, man hopes; in common souls
Hope is but vague and undefined,
Till from the poet's tongue the message rolls
A blessing to his kind.

Never did Poesy appear
So full of heaven to me, as when
I saw how it would pierce through pride and fear,
To the lives of coarsest men.

It may be glorious to write
Thoughts that shall glad the two or three
High souls, like those far stars that come in sight
Once in a century; —

But better far it is to speak
One simple word, which now and then
Shall waken their free nature in the weak
And friendless sons of men;

To write some earnest verse or line
Which, seeking not the praise of art,
Shall make a clearer faith and manhood shine
In the untutored heart.

He who doth this, in verse or prose,
May be forgotten in his day,
But surely shall be crowned at last with those
Who live and speak for aye.

HEBE

I saw the twinkle of white feet,
I saw the flash of robes descending;
Before her ran an influence fleet,
That bowed my heart like barley bending.

As, in bare fields, the searching bees
Pilot to blooms beyond our finding,
It led me on, by sweet degrees
Joy's simple honey-cells unbinding.

Those Graces were that seemed grim Fates,
With nearer love the sky leaned o'er me;
The long-sought Secret's golden gates
On musical hinges swung before me.

I saw the brimmed bowl in her grasp
Thrilling with godhood; like a lover
I sprang the proffered life to clasp; —
The beaker fell; the luck was over.

The Earth has drunk the vintage up;
What boots it patch the goblet's splinters?
Can Summer fill the icy cup,
Whose treacherous crystal is but Winter's?

O spendthrift Haste! await the gods;
Their nectar crowns the lips of Patience;
Haste scatters on unthankful sods
The immortal gift in vain libations.

Coy Hebe flies from those that woo,
And shuns the hands would seize upon her;
Follow thy life, and she will sue
To pour for thee the cup of honor.

TO THE DANDELION

Dear common flower, that grow'st beside the way,
Fringing the dusty road with harmless gold,

First pledge of blithesome May,
Which children pluck, and, full of pride, uphold,
High-hearted buccaneers, o'erjoyed that they
An Eldorado in the grass have found,
Which not the rich earth's ample round
May match in wealth — thou art more dear to me
Than all the prouder summer-blooms may be.

Gold such as thine ne'er drew the Spanish prow
Through the primeval hush of Indian seas,
Nor wrinkled the lean brow
Of age, to rob the lover's heart of ease;
'T is the Spring's largess, which she scatters now
To rich and poor alike, with lavish hand,
Though most hearts never understand
To take it at God's value, but pass by
The offered wealth with unrewarded eye.

Thou art my tropics and mine Italy;
To look at thee unlocks a warmer clime;

The eyes thou givest me
Are in the heart, and heed not space or time.
Not in mid June the golden-cuirassed bee
Feels a more summer-like, warm ravishment
In the white lily's breezy tent,
His fragrant Sybaris, than I, when first
From the dark green thy yellow circles burst.

Then think I of deep shadows on the grass, —
Of meadows where in sun the cattle graze,
Where, as the breezes pass,
The gleaming rushes lean a thousand ways, —
Of leaves that slumber in a cloudy mass,
Or whiten in the wind, of waters blue
That from the distance sparkle through
Some woodland gap, and of a sky above,
Where one white cloud like a stray lamb doth move.

My childhood's earliest thoughts are linked with thee;
The sight of thee calls back the robin's song,
Who, from the dark old tree
Beside the door, sang clearly all day long,

And I, secure in childish piety,
Listened as if I heard an angel sing
With news from Heaven, which he could bring
Fresh every day to my untainted ears,
When birds and flowers and I were happy peers.

Thou art the type of those meek charities
Which make up half the nobleness of life,
Those cheap delights the wise
Pluck from the dusty wayside of earth's strife;
Words of frank cheer, glances of friendly eyes,
Love's smallest coin, which yet to some may give
The morsel that may keep alive
A starving heart, and teach it to behold
Some glimpse of God where all before was cold.

Thy wingèd seeds, whereof the winds take care,
Are like the words of poet and of sage
Which through the free heaven fare,
And, now unheeded, in another age
Take root, and to the gladdened future bear

That witness which the present would not heed,
Bringing forth many a thought and deed,
And, planted safely in the eternal sky,
Bloom into stars which earth is guided by.

Full of deep love thou art, yet not more full
Than all thy common brethren of the ground,
Wherein, were we not dull,
Some words of highest wisdom might be found,
Yet earnest faith from day to day may cull
Some syllables, which, rightly joined, can make
A spell to soothe life's bitterest ache,
And ope Heaven's portals, which are near us still,
Yea, nearer ever than the gates of Ill.

How like a prodigal doth nature seem,
When thou, for all thy gold, so common art!
Thou teachest me to deem
More sacredly of every human heart,
Since each reflects in joy its scanty gleam
Of Heaven, and could some wondrous secret show,
Did we but pay the love we owe,

And with a child's undoubting wisdom look
On all these living pages of God's book.

But let me read thy lesson right or no,
Of one good gift from thee my heart is sure;
Old I shall never grow
While thou each year dost come to keep me pure
With legends of my childhood; ah, we owe
Well more than half life's holiness to these
Nature's first lowly influences,
At thought of which the heart's glad doors burst ope,
In dreariest days, to welcome peace and hope.

MY LOVE

Not as all other women are
Is she that to my soul is dear;
Her glorious fancies come from far,
Beneath the silver evening-star,
And yet her heart is ever near.

Great feelings hath she of her own,
Which lesser souls may never know;

God giveth them to her alone,
And sweet they are as any tone
Wherewith the wind may choose to blow.

Yet in herself she dwelleth not,
Although no home were half so fair;
No simplest duty is forgot,
Life hath no dim and lowly spot
That doth not in her sunshine share.

She doeth little kindnesses,
Which most leave undone, or despise;
For naught that sets one heart at ease,
And giveth happiness or peace,
Is low-esteemèd in her eyes.

She hath no scorn of common things,
And, though she seem of other birth,
Round us her heart entwines and clings,
And patiently she folds her wings
To tread the humble paths of earth.

Blessing she is: God made her so,
And deeds of week-day holiness

Fall from her noiseless as the snow,
Nor hath she ever chanced to know
That aught were easier than to bless.

She is most fair, and thereunto
Her life doth rightly harmonize;
Feeling or thought that was not true
Ne'er made less beautiful the blue
Unclouded heaven of her eyes.

She is a woman: one in whom
The spring-time of her childish years
Hath never lost its fresh perfume,
Though knowing well that life hath room
For many blights and many tears.

I love her with a love as still
As a broad river's peaceful might,
Which, by high tower and lowly mill,
Goes wandering at its own will,
And yet doth ever flow aright.

And, on its full, deep breast serene,
Like quiet isles my duties lie;
It flows around them and between,

And makes them fresh and fair and green,
Sweet homes wherein to live and die.

THE CHANGELING

I HAD a little daughter,
And she was given to me
To lead me gently backward
To the Heavenly Father's knee,
That I, by the force of nature,
Might in some dim wise divine
The depth of his infinite patience
To this wayward soul of mine.

I know not how others saw her,
But to me she was wholly fair,
And the light of the heaven she came from
Still lingered and gleamed in her hair;
For it was as wavy and golden,
And as many changes took,
As the shadows of sun-gilt ripples
On the yellow bed of a brook.

To what can I liken her smiling
Upon me, her kneeling lover?

How it leaped from her lips to her eyelids,
And dimpled her wholly over,
Till her outstretched hands smiled also,
And I almost seemed to see
The very heart of her mother
Sending sun through her veins to me!

She had been with us scarce a twelve-month,
And it hardly seemed a day,
When a troop of wandering angels
Stole my little daughter away;
Or perhaps those heavenly Zingari
But loosed the hampering strings,
And when they had opened her cage-door,
My little bird used her wings.

But they left in her stead a changeling,
A little angel child,
That seems like her bud in full blossom,
And smiles as she never smiled:
When I wake in the morning, I see it
Where she always used to lie,
And I feel as weak as a violet
Alone 'neath the awful sky.

As weak, yet as trustful also;
For the whole year long I see
All the wonders of faithful Nature
Still worked for the love of me;
Winds wander, and dews drip earthward,
Rain falls, suns rise and set,
Earth whirls, and all but to prosper
A poor little violet.

This child is not mine as the first was,
I cannot sing it to rest,
I cannot lift it up fatherly
And bliss it upon my breast;
Yet it lies in my little one's cradle
And sits in my little one's chair,
And the light of the heaven she's gone to
Transfigures its golden hair.

AN INDIAN-SUMMER REVERIE

What visionary tints the year puts on,
When falling leaves falter through motionless air
Or numbly cling and shiver to be gone!
How shimmer the low flats and pastures bare,

As with her nectar Hebe Autumn fills
The bowl between me and those distant hills,
And smiles and shakes abroad her misty, tremulous hair!

No more the landscape holds its wealth apart,
Making me poorer in my poverty,
But mingles with my senses and my heart;
My own projected spirit seems to me
In her own reverie the world to steep;
'T is she that waves to sympathetic sleep,
Moving, as she is moved, each field and hill and tree.

How fuse and mix, with what unfelt degrees,
Clasped by the faint horizon's languid arms,
Each into each, the hazy distances!
The softened season all the landscape charms;
Those hills, my native village that embay,

In waves of dreamier purple roll away,
And floating in mirage seem all the glimmering farms.

Far distant sounds the hidden chickadee
Close at my side; far distant sound the leaves;
The fields seem fields of dream, where Memory
Wanders like gleaning Ruth; and as the sheaves
Of wheat and barley wavered in the eye
Of Boåz as the maiden's glow went by,
So tremble and seem remote all things the sense receives.

The cock's shrill trump that tells of scattered corn,
Passed breezily on by all his flapping mates,
Faint and more faint, from barn to barn is borne,
Southward, perhaps to far Magellan's Straits;
Dimly I catch the throb of distant flails;
Silently overhead the hen-hawk sails,

With watchful, measuring eye, and for his quarry waits.

The sobered robin, hunger-silent now,
Seeks cedar-berries blue, his autumn cheer;
The chipmunk, on the shingly shagbark's bough,
Now saws, now lists with downward eye and ear,
Then drops his nut, and, cheeping, with a bound
Whisks to his winding fastness underground;
The clouds like swans drift down the streaming atmosphere.

O'er yon bare knoll the pointed cedar shadows
Drowse on the crisp, gray moss; the ploughman's call
Creeps faint as smoke from black, fresh-furrowed meadows;
The single crow a single caw lets fall;
And all around me every bush and tree

Says Autumn's hêre, and Winter soon will be,
Who snows his soft, white sleep and silence over all.

The birch, most shy and ladylike of trees,
Her poverty, as best she may, retrieves,
And hints at her foregone gentilities
With some saved relics of her wealth of leaves;
The swamp-oak, with his royal purple on,
Glares red as blood across the sinking sun,
As one who proudlier to a falling fortune cleaves.

He looks a sachem, in red blanket wrapt,
Who, 'mid some council of the sad-garbed whites,
Erect and stern, in his own memories lapt,
With distant eye broods over other sights,
Sees the hushed wood the city's flare replace,
The wounded turf heal o'er the railway's trace,

And roams the savage Past of his undwindled rights.

The red-oak, softer-grained, yields all for lost,
And, with his crumpled foliage stiff and dry,
After the first betrayal of the frost,
Rebuffs the kiss of the relenting sky;
The chestnuts, lavish of their long-hid gold,
To the faint Summer, beggared now and old,
Pour back the sunshine hoarded 'neath her favoring eye.

The ash her purple drops forgivingly
And sadly, breaking not the general hush;
The maple-swamps glow like a sunset sea,
Each leaf a ripple with its separate flush;
All round the wood's edge creeps the skirting blaze
Of bushes low, as when, on cloudy days,
Ere the rain falls, the cautious farmer burns his brush.

O'er yon low wall, which guards one unkempt zone,
Where vines and weeds and scrub-oaks intertwine
Safe from the plough, whose rough, discordant stone
Is massed to one soft gray by lichens fine,
The tangled blackberry, crossed and recrossed, weaves
A prickly network of ensanguined leaves;
Hard by, with coral beads, the prim black-alders shine.

Pillaring with flame this crumbling boundary,
Whose loose blocks topple 'neath the plough-boy's foot,
Who, with each sense shut fast except the eye,
Creeps close and scares the jay he hoped to shoot,
The woodbine up the elm's straight stem aspires,
Coiling it, harmless, with autumnal fires;

In the ivy's paler blaze the martyr oak stands mute.

Below, the Charles, a stripe of nether sky,
Now hid by rounded apple-trees between,
Whose gaps the misplaced sail sweeps bellying by,
Now flickering golden through a woodland screen,
Then spreading out, at his next turn beyond,
A silver circle like an inland pond —
Slips seaward silently through marshes purple and green.

Dear marshes! vain to him the gift of sight
Who cannot in their various incomes share,
From every season drawn, of shade and light,
Who sees in them but levels brown and bare;
Each change of storm or sunshine scatters free

On them its largess of variety,
For Nature with cheap means still works her wonders rare.

In spring they lie one broad expanse of green,
O'er which the light winds run with glimmering feet:
Here, yellower stripes track out the creek unseen,
There, darker growths o'er hidden ditches meet;
And purpler stains show where the blossoms crowd,
As if the silent shadow of a cloud
Hung there becalmed, with the next breath to fleet.

All round, upon the river's slippery edge,
Witching to deeper calm the drowsy tide,
Whispers and leans the breeze-entangling sedge;
Through emerald glooms the lingering waters slide,

Or, sometimes wavering, throw back the sun,
And the stiff banks in eddies melt and run
Of dimpling light, and with the current seem to glide.

In summer 't is a blithesome sight to see,
As, step by step, with measured swing, they pass,
The wide-ranked mowers wading to the knee,
Their sharp scythes panting through the wiry grass;
Then, stretched beneath a rick's shade in a ring,
Their nooning take, while one begins to sing
A stave that droops and dies 'neath the close sky of brass.

Meanwhile that devil-may-care, the bobolink,
Remembering duty, in mid-quaver stops

Just ere he sweeps o'er rapture's tremulous brink,
And 'twixt the winrows most demurely drops,
A decorous bird of business, who provides
For his brown mate and fledglings six besides,
And looks from right to left, a farmer 'mid his crops.

Another change subdues them in the fall,
But saddens not; they still show merrier tints,
Though sober russet seems to cover all;
When the first sunshine through their dew-drops glints,
Look how the yellow clearness, streamed across,
Redeems with rarer hues the season's loss,
As Dawn's feet there had touched and left their rosy prints.

Or come when sunset gives its freshened zest,
Lean o'er the bridge and let the ruddy thrill,

While the shorn sun swells down the hazy west,
Glow opposite; — the marshes drink their fill
And swoon with purple veins, then slowly fade
Through pink to brown, as eastward moves the shade,
Lengthening with stealthy creep, of Simond's darkening hill.

Later, and yet ere winter wholly shuts,
Ere through the first dry snow the runner grates,
And the loath cart-wheel screams in slippery ruts,
While firmer ice the eager boy awaits,
Trying each buckle and strap beside the fire,
And until bedtime plays with his desire,
Twenty times putting on and off his new-bought skates; —

Then, every morn, the river's banks shine bright

With smooth plate-armor, treacherous and frail,
By the frost's clinking hammers forged at night,
'Gainst which the lances of the sun prevail,
Giving a pretty emblem of the day
When guiltier arms in light shall melt away,
And states shall move free-limbed, loosed from war's cramping mail.

And now those waterfalls the ebbing river
Twice every day creates on either side
Tinkle, as through their fresh-sparred grots they shiver
In grass-arched channels to the sun denied;
High flaps in sparkling blue the far-heard crow,
The silvered flats gleam frostily below,
Suddenly drops the gull and breaks the glassy tide.

But crowned in turn by vying seasons three,

Their winter halo hath a fuller ring;
This glory seems to rest immovably, —
The others were too fleet and vanishing;
When the hid tide is at its highest flow,
O'er marsh and stream one breathless trance of snow
With brooding fulness awes and hushes everything.

The sunshine seems blown off by the bleak wind,
As pale as formal candles lit by day;
Gropes to the sea the river dumb and blind;
The brown ricks, snow-thatched by the storm in play,
Show pearly breakers combing o'er their lee,
White crests as of some just enchanted sea,
Checked in their maddest leap and hanging poised midway.

But when the eastern blow, with rain aslant,

From mid-sea's prairies green and rolling plains
Drives in his wallowing herds of billows gaunt,
And the roused Charles remembers in his veins
Old Ocean's blood and snaps his gyves of frost,
That tyrannous silence on the shores is tost
In dreary wreck, and crumbling desolation reigns.

Edgewise or flat, in Druid-like device,
With leaden pools between or gullies bare,
The blocks lie strewn, a bleak Stonehenge of ice;
No life, no sound, to break the grim despair,
Save sullen plunge, as through the sedges stiff
Down crackles riverward some thaw-sapped cliff,
Or when the close-wedged fields of ice crunch here and there.

But let me turn from fancy-pictured scenes
To that whose pastoral calm before me lies:
Here nothing harsh or rugged intervenes
The early evening with her misty dyes
Smooths off the ravelled edges of the nigh,
Relieves the distant with her cooler sky,
And tones the landscape down, and soothes the wearied eyes.

There gleams my native village, dear to me,
Though higher change's waves each day are seen,
Whelming fields famed in boyhood's history,
Sanding with houses the diminished green,
There, in red brick, which softening time defies,
Stand square and stiff the Muses' factories; —
How with my life knit up is every well-known scene!

Flow on, dear river! not alone you flow

To outward sight, and through your marshes wind;
Fed from the mystic springs of long-ago,
Your twin flows silent through my world of mind:
Grow dim, dear marshes, in the evening's gray!
Before my inner sight ye stretch away,
And will forever, though these fleshly eyes grow blind.

Beyond the hillock's house-bespotted swell,
Where Gothic chapels house the horse and chaise,
Where quiet cits in Grecian temples dwell,
Where Coptic tombs resound with prayer and praise,
Where dust and mud the equal year divide,
There gentle Allston lived, and wrought, and died,
Transfiguring street and shop with his illumined gaze.

Virgilium vidi tantum, — I have seen

But as a boy, who looks alike on all,
That misty hair, that fine Undine-like mien,
Tremulous as down to feeling's faintest call;—
Ah, dear old homestead! count it to thy fame
That thither many times the Painter came; —
One elm yet bears his name, a feathery tree and tall.

Swiftly the present fades in memory's glow, —
Our only sure possession is the past;
The village blacksmith died a month ago,
And dim to me the forge's roaring blast;
Soon fire-new medievals we shall see
Oust the black smithy from its chestnut-tree,
And that hewn down, perhaps, the bee-hive green and vast.

How many times, prouder than king on throne,

Loosed from the village school-dame's A's and B's,
Panting have I the creaky bellows blown,
And watched the pent volcano's red increase,
Then paused to see the ponderous sledge, brought down
By that hard arm voluminous and brown,
From the white iron swarm its golden vanishing bees.

Dear native town! whose choking elms each year
With eddying dust before their time turn gray,
Pining for rain, — to me thy dust is dear;
It glorifies the eve of summer day,
And when the westering sun half sunken burns,
The mote-thick air to deepest orange turns,
The westward horseman rides through clouds of gold away,

So palpable, I've seen those unshorn few,

The six old willows at the causey's end
(Such trees Paul Potter never dreamed nor drew),
Through this dry mist their checkering shadows send,
Striped, here and there, with many a long-drawn thread,
Where streamed through leafy chinks the trembling red,
Past which, in one bright trail, the hang-bird's flashes blend.

Yes, dearer far thy dust than all that e'er,
Beneath the awarded crown of victory,
Gilded the blown Olympic charioteer;
Though lightly prized the ribboned parchments three,
Yet *collegisse juvat*, I am glad
That here what colleging was mine I had, —
It linked another tie, dear native town, with thee!

Nearer art thou than simply native earth,

My dust with thine concedes a deeper tie;
A closer claim thy soil may well put forth,
Something of kindred more than sympathy;
For in thy bounds I reverently laid away
That blinding anguish of forsaken clay,
That title I seemed to have in earth and sea and sky,

That portion of my life more choice to me
(Though brief, yet in itself so round and whole)
Than all the imperfect residue can be; —
The Artist saw his statue of the soul
Was perfect; so, with one regretful stroke,
The earthen model into fragments broke,
And without her the impoverished seasons roll.

THE OAK

What gnarlèd stretch, what depth of shade, is his!
There needs no crown to mark the forest's king;

How in his leaves outshines full summer's bliss!
Sun, storm, rain, dew, to him their tribute bring,
Which he with such benignant royalty
Accepts, as overpayeth what is lent;
All nature seems his vassal proud to be,
And cunning only for his ornament.

How towers he, too, amid the billowed snows,
An unquelled exile from the summer's throne,
Whose plain, uncinctured front more kingly shows,
Now that the obscuring courtier leaves are flown.
His boughs make music of the winter air,
Jewelled with sleet, like some cathedral front
Where clinging snow-flakes with quaint art repair
The dents and furrows of time's envious brunt.

How doth his patient strength the rude March wind

Persuade to seem glad breaths of summer breeze,
And win the soil, that fain would be unkind,
To swell his revenues with proud increase!
He is the gem; and all the landscape wide
(So doth his grandeur isolate the sense)
Seems but the setting, worthless all beside,
An empty socket, were he fallen thence.

So, from oft converse with life's wintry gales,
Should man learn how to clasp with tougher roots
The inspiring earth; how otherwise avails
The leaf-creating sap that sunward shoots?
So every year that falls with noiseless flake
Should fill old scars up on the stormward side,
And make hoar age revered for age's sake,
Not for traditions of youth's leafy pride.

So, from the pinched soil of a churlish fate,
True hearts compel the sap of sturdier growth,
So between earth and heaven stand simply great,

That these shall seem but their attendants both;
For nature's forces with obedient zeal
Wait on the rooted faith and oaken will;
As quickly the pretender's cheat they feel,
And turn mad Pucks to flout and mock him still.

Lord! all Thy works are lessons; each contains
Some emblem of man's all-containing soul;
Shall he make fruitless all thy glorious pains,
Delving within thy grace an eyeless mole?
Make me the least of thy Dodona-grove,
Cause me some message of thy truth to bring,
Speak but a word through me, nor let thy love
Among my boughs disdain to perch and sing.

BEAVER BROOK

Hushed with broad sunlight lies the hill,
And, minuting the long day's loss,
The cedar's shadow, slow and still,
Creeps o'er its dial of gray moss.

Warm noon brims full the valley's cup,
The aspen's leaves are scarce astir;
Only the little mill sends up
Its busy, never-ceasing burr.

Climbing the loose-piled wall that hems
The road along the mill-pond's brink,
From 'neath the arching barberry-stems
My footstep scares the shy chewink.

Beneath a bony buttonwood
The mill's red door lets forth the din;
The whitened miller, dust-imbued,
Flits past the square of dark within.

No mountain torrent's strength is here;
Sweet Beaver, child of forest still,
Heaps its small pitcher to the ear,
And gently waits the miller's will.

Swift slips Undine along the race
Unheard, and then, with flashing bound,
Floods the dull wheel with light and grace,
And, laughing, hunts the loath drudge round.

The miller dreams not at what cost
The quivering millstones hum and whirl,
Nor how for every turn are tost
Armfuls of diamond and of pearl.

But Summer cleared my happier eyes
With drops of some celestial juice,
To see how Beauty underlies,
Forevermore each form of use.

And more; methought I saw that flood,
Which now so dull and darkling steals,
Thick, here and there, with human blood,
To turn the world's laborious wheels.

No more than doth the miller there,
Shut in our several cells, do we
Know with what waste of beauty rare
Moves every day's machinery.

Surely the wiser time shall come
When this fine overplus of might,
No longer sullen, slow, and dumb,
Shall leap to music and to light.

In that new childhood of the Earth
Life of itself shall dance and play,
Fresh blood in Time's shrunk veins make mirth,
And labor meet delight half-way.

THE PRESENT CRISIS

When a deed is done for Freedom, through the broad earth's aching breast
Runs a thrill of joy prophetic, trembling on from east to west,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels the soul within him climb
To the awful verge of manhood, as the energy sublime
Of a century bursts full-blossomed on the thorny stem of Time.

Through the walls of hut and palace shoots the instantaneous throe,
When the travail of the Ages wrings earth's systems to and fro;
At the birth of each new Era, with a recognizing start,

Nation wildly looks at nation, standing with mute lips apart,
And glad Truth's yet mightier man-child leaps beneath the Future's heart.

So the Evil's triumph sendeth, with a terror and a chill,
Under continent to continent, the sense of coming ill,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels his sympathies with God
In hot tear-drops ebbing earthward, to be drunk up by the sod,
Till a corpse crawls round unburied, delving in the nobler clod.

For mankind are one in spirit, and an instinct bears along,
Round the earth's electric circle, the swift flash of right or wrong;
Whether conscious or unconscious, yet Humanity's vast frame
Through its ocean-sundered fibres feels the gush of joy or shame; —

In the gain or loss of one race all the rest have equal claim.

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light.

Hast thou chosen, O my people, on whose party thou shalt stand,
Ere the Doom from its worn sandals shakes the dust against our land?
Though the cause of Evil prosper, yet 't is Truth alone is strong,
And, albeit she wander outcast now, I see around her throng
Troops of beautiful, tall angels, to enshield her from all wrong.

Backward look across the ages and the beacon-moments see,
That, like peaks of some sunk continent, jut through Oblivion's sea;
Not an ear in court or market for the low foreboding cry
Of those Crises, God's stern winnowers, from whose feet earth's chaff must fly;
Never shows the choice momentous till the judgment hath passed by.

Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but record
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the Word;
Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the Throne, —
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.

We see dimly in the Present what is small and what is great,

Slow of faith how weak an arm may turn the iron helm of fate,
But the soul is still oracular; amid the market's din,
List the ominous stern whisper from the Delphic cave within, —
"They enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin."

Slavery, the earth-born Cyclops, fellest of the giant brood,
Sons of brutish Force and Darkness, who have drenched the earth with blood,
Famished in his self-made desert, blinded by our purer day,
Gropes in yet unblasted regions for his miserable prey; —
Shall we guide his gory fingers where our helpless children play?

Then to side with Truth is noble when we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 't is prosperous to be just;

Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward stands aside,
Doubting in his abject spirit, till his Lord is crucified,
And the multitude make virtue of the faith they had denied.

Count me o'er earth's chosen heroes, — they were souls that stood alone,
While the men they agonized for hurled the contumelious stone,
Stood serene, and down the future saw the golden beam incline
To the side of perfect justice, mastered by their faith divine,
By one man's plain truth to manhood and to God's supreme design.

By the light of burning heretics Christ's bleeding feet I track,
Toiling up new Calvaries ever with the cross that turns not back,
And these mounts of anguish number how each generation learned

One new word of that grand *Credo* which in
prophet-hearts hath burned
Since the first man stood God-conquered with
his face to heaven upturned.

For Humanity sweeps onward: where to-day
the martyr stands,
On the morrow crouches Judas with the silver
in his hands;
Far in front the cross stands ready and the
crackling fagots burn,
While the hooting mob of yesterday in silent
awe return
To glean up the scattered ashes into History's
golden urn.

'T is as easy to be heroes as to sit the idle
slaves
Of a legendary virtue carved upon our fathers'
graves;
Worshippers of light ancestral make the pres-
ent light a crime; —
Was the Mayflower launched by cowards,
steered by men behind their time?

Turn those tracks toward Past or Future,
that make Plymouth Rock sublime?

They were men of present valor, stalwart old
iconoclasts,
Unconvinced by axe or gibbet that all virtue
was the Past's;
But we make their truth our falsehood, think-
ing that hath made us free,
Hoarding it in mouldy parchments, while our
tender spirits flee
The rude grasp of that great Impulse which
drove them across the sea.

They have rights who dare maintain them;
we are traitors to our sires,
Smothering in their holy ashes Freedom's
new-lit altar-fires;
Shall we make their creed our jailer? Shall
we, in our haste to slay,
From the tombs of the old prophets steal the
funeral lamps away
To light up the martyr-fagots round the pro-
phets of to-day?

New occasions teach new duties; Time makes
ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still, and onward, who
would keep abreast of Truth;
Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires! we our-
selves must Pilgrims be,
Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly
through the desperate winter sea,
Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's
blood-rusted key.

THE COURTIN'

God makes sech nights, all white an' still
Fur 'z you can look or listen,
Moonshine an' snow on field an' hill,
All silence an' all glisten.

Zekle crep' up quite unbeknown
An' peeked in thru' the winder,
An' there sot Huldy all alone,
With no one nigh to hender.

A fireplace filled the room's one side
With half a cord o' wood in,—

There warn't no stoves till comfort died,
To bake ye to a puddin'.

The wa'nut logs shot sparkles out
Toward the pootiest, bless her!
An' leetle flames danced all about
The chiny on the dresser.

Agin the chimbley crook-necks hung,
An' in amongst 'em rusted
The ole queen's-arm thet gran'ther Young
Fetched back from Concord busted.

The very room, coz she was in,
Seemed warm from floor to ceilin',
An' she looked full ez rosy agin
Ez the apples she was peelin'.

'T was kin' o' kingdom-come to look
On sech a blessed cretur,
A dogrose blushin' to a brook
Ain't modester nor sweeter.

He was six foot o' man, A 1,
Clearn grit an' human natur';

None could n't quicker pitch a ton
Nor dror a furrer straighter.

He'd sparked it with full twenty gals,
Hed squired 'em, danced 'em, druv 'em,
Fust this one, an' then thet, by spells,—
All is, he could n't love 'em.

But long o' her his veins 'ould run
All crinkly like curled maple,
The side she breshed felt full o' sun
Ez a south slope in Ap'il.

She thought no v'ice hed sech a swing
Ez hisn in the choir;
My! when he made Ole Hunderd ring,
She *knowed* the Lord was nigher.

An' she'd blush scarlit, right in prayer,
When her new meetin'-bunnet
Felt somehow thru' its crown a pair
O' blue eyes sot upon it.

Thet night, I tell ye, she looked *some!*
She seemed to 've gut a new soul,

For she felt sartin-sure he'd come,
Down to her very shoe-sole.

She heered a foot, an' knowed it tu,
A-raspin' on the scraper, —
All ways to once her feelins flew
Like sparks in burnt-up paper.

He kin'o' l'itered on the mat,
Some doubtfle o' the sekle,
His heart kep' goin' pity-pat,
But hern went pity Zekle.

An' yit she gin her cheer a jerk
Ez though she wished him furder,
An' on her apples kep' to work,
Parin' away like murder.

"You want to see my Pa, I s'pose?"
"Wal . . . no . . . I come designin'" —
"To see my Ma? She's sprinklin' clo'es
Agin to-morrer's i'nin'."

To say why gals acts so or so,
Or don't, would be presumin';

Mebby to mean *yes* an' say *no*
Comes nateral to women.

He stood a spell on one foot fust,
Then stood a spell on t'other,
An' on which one he felt the wust
He could n't ha' told ye nuther.

Says he, "I'd better call agin;"
Says she, "Think likely, Mister:"
That last word pricked him like a pin.
An' . . . Wal, he up an' kist her.

When Ma bimeby upon 'em slips,
Huldy sot pale ez ashes,
All kin' o' smily roun' the lips
An' teary roun' the lashes.

For she was jist the quiet kind
Whose naturs never vary,
Like streams that keep a summer mind
Snowhid in Jenooary.

The blood clost roun' her heart felt glued
Too tight for all expressin',

Tell mother see how metters stood,
An' gin 'em both her blessin'.

Then her red come back like the tide
Down to the Bay o' Fundy,
An' all I know is they was cried
In meetin' come nex' Sunday.

ODE RECITED AT THE HARVARD COMMEMORATION

JULY 21, 1865

I

Weak-winged is song,
Nor aims at that clear-ethered height
Whither the brave deed climbs for light:
We seem to do them wrong,
Bringing our robin's-leaf to deck their hearse
Who in warm life-blood wrote their nobler verse,
Our trivial song to honor those who come
With ears attuned to strenuous trump and drum,
And shaped in squadron-strophes their desire,

Live battle-odes whose lines were steel and fire:
Yet sometimes feathered words are strong,
A gracious memory to buoy up and save
From Lethe's dreamless ooze, the common grave
Of the unventurous throng.

II

To-day our Reverend Mother welcomes back
Her wisest Scholars, those who understood
The deeper teaching of her mystic tome,
And offered their fresh lives to make it good:
No lore of Greece or Rome,
No science peddling with the names of things,
Or reading stars to find inglorious fates,
Can lift our life with wings
Far from Death's idle gulf that for the many waits,
And lengthen out our dates
With that clear fame whose memory sings
In manly hearts to come, and nerves them and dilates:

Nor such thy teaching, Mother of us all!
Not such the trumpet-call
Of thy diviner mood,
That could thy sons entice
From happy homes and toils, the fruitful nest
Of those half-virtues which the world calls best,
Into War's tumult rude;
But rather far that stern device
The sponsors chose that round thy cradle stood
In the dim, unventured wood,
The VERITAS that lurks beneath
The letter's unprolific sheath,
Life of whate'er makes life worth living,
Seed-grain of high emprise, immortal food,
One heavenly thing whereof earth hath the giving.

III

Many loved Truth, and lavished life's best oil
Amid the dust of books to find her,
Content at last, for guerdon of their toil,
With the cast mantle she hath left behind her.

Many in sad faith sought for her,
Many with crossed hands sighed for her;
But these, our brothers, fought for her,
At life's dear peril wrought for her,
So loved her that they died for her,
Tasting the raptured fleetness
Of her divine completeness:
Their higher instinct knew
Those love her best who to themselves are true,
And what they dare to dream of, dare to do;
They followed her and found her
Where all may hope to find,
Not in the ashes of the burnt-out mind,
But beautiful, with danger's sweetness round her.
Where faith made whole with deed
Breathes its awakening breath
Into the lifeless creed,
They saw her plumed and mailed,
With sweet, stern face unveiled,
And all-repaying eyes, look proud on them in death.

IV

Our slender life runs rippling by, and glides
Into the silent hollow of the past;
What is there that abides
To make the next age better for the last?
Is earth too poor to give us
Something to live for here that shall outlive us,—
Some more substantial boon
Than such as flows and ebbs with Fortune's fickle moon?
The little that we see
From doubt is never free;
The little that we do
Is but half-nobly true;
With our laborious hiving
What men call treasure, and the gods call dross,
Life seems a jest of Fate's contriving,
Only secure in every one's conniving,
A long account of nothings paid with loss,
Where we poor puppets, jerked by unseen wires,

After our little hour of strut and rave,
With all our pasteboard passions and desires,
Loves, hates, ambitions, and immortal fires,
Are tossed pell-mell together in the grave.
Ah, there is something here
Unfathomed by the cynic's sneer,
Something that gives our feeble light
A high immunity from Night,
Something that leaps life's narrow bars
To claim its birthright with the hosts of heaven;
A seed of sunshine that doth leaven
Our earthly dulness with the beams of stars,
And glorify our clay
With light from fountains elder than the Day;
A conscience more divine than we,
A gladness fed with secret tears,
A vexing, forward-reaching sense
Of some more noble permanence;
A light across the sea,
Which haunts the soul and will not let it be,
Still glimmering from the heights of undegenerate years.

V

Whither leads the path
To ampler fates that leads?
Not down through flowery meads,
To reap an aftermath
Of youth's vainglorious weeds,
But up the steep, amid the wrath
And shock of deadly hostile creeds,
Where the world's best hope and stay
By battle's flashes gropes a desperate way,
And every turf the fierce foot clings to bleeds
Peace hath her not ignoble wreath,
Ere yet the sharp, decisive word
Lights the black lips of cannon, and the sword
Dreams in its easeful sheath;
But some day the live coal behind the thought,
Whether from Baäl's stone obscene,
Or from the shrine serene
Of God's pure altar brought,
Bursts up in flame; the war of tongue and pen
Learns with what deadly purpose it was fraught,
And, helpless in the fiery passion caught,

Shakes all the pillared state with shock of men:
Some day the soft Ideal that we wooed
Confronts us fiercely, foe-beset, pursued,
And cries reproachful: "Was it, then, my praise,
And not myself was loved? Prove now thy truth;
I claim of thee the promise of thy youth;
Give me thy life, or cower in empty phrase,
The victim of thy genius, not its mate!"
Life may be given in many ways,
And loyalty to Truth be sealed
As bravely in the closet as the field,
So generous is Fate;
But then to stand beside her,
When craven churls deride her,
To front a lie in arms and not to yield,—
This shows, methinks, God's plan
And measure of a stalwart man,
Limbed like the old heroic breeds,
Who stands self-poised on manhood's solid earth,
Not forced to frame excuses for his birth,
Fed from within with all the strength he needs.

VI

Such was he, our Martyr-Chief,
Whom late the Nation he had led,
With ashes on her head,
Wept with the passion of an angry grief:
Forgive me, if from present things I turn
To speak what in my heart will beat and burn,
And hang my wreath on his world-honored urn.
Nature, they say, doth dote,
And cannot make a man
Save on some worn-out plan,
Repeating us by rote:
For him her Old-World mould aside she threw,
And, choosing sweet clay from the breast
Of the unexhausted West,
With stuff untainted shaped a hero new,
Wise, steadfast in the strength of God, and true.
How beautiful to see
Once more a shepherd of mankind indeed,
Who loved his charge, but never loved to lead;
One whose meek flock the people joyed to be,

Not lured by any cheat of birth,
But by his clear-grained human worth,
And brave old wisdom of sincerity!
They knew that outward grace is dust;
They could not choose but trust
In that sure-footed mind's unfaltering skill,
And supple-tempered will
That bent like perfect steel to spring again and thrust.
Nothing of Europe here,
Or, then, of Europe fronting morn-ward still,
Ere any names of Serf and Peer
Could Nature's equal scheme deface;
Here was a type of the true elder race,
And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face.
I praise him not; it were too late;
And some innative weakness there must be
In him who condescends to victory
Such as the Present gives, and cannot wait,
Safe in himself as in a fate.
So always firmly he:
He knew to bide his time,
And can his fame abide,

Still patient in his simple faith sublime,
Till the wise years decide.
Great captains, with their guns and drums,
Disturb our judgment for the hour,
But at last silence comes;
These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,
Our children shall behold his fame,
The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
New birth of our new soil, the first American.

VII

Long as man's hope insatiate can discern
Or only guess some more inspiring goal
Outside of Self, enduring as the pole,
Along whose course the flying axles burn
Of spirits bravely-pitched, earth's manlier brood;
Long as below we cannot find
The meed that stills the inexorable mind;
So long this faith to some ideal Good,
Under whatever mortal names it masks,

Freedom, Law, Country, this ethereal mood
That thanks the Fates for their severer tasks,
Feeling its challenged pulses leap,
While others skulk in subterfuges cheap,
And, set in Danger's van, has all the boon it asks,
Shall win man's praise and woman's love,
Shall be a wisdom that we set above
All other skills and gifts to culture dear,
A virtue round whose forehead we enwreathe
Laurels that with a living passion breathe
When other crowns are cold and soon grow sere.
What brings us thronging these high rites to pay,
And seal these hours the noblest of our year,
Save that our brothers found this better way?

VIII

We sit here in the Promised Land
That flows with Freedom's honey and milk,
But 't was they won it, sword in hand,
Making the nettle danger soft for us as silk.

We welcome back our bravest and our best; —
Ah me! not all! some come not with the rest,
Who went forth brave and bright as any here!
I strive to mix some gladness with my strain,
But the sad strings complain,
And will not please the ear;
I sweep them for a pæan, but they wane
Again and yet again
Into a dirge, and die away in pain.
In these brave ranks I only see the gaps,
Thinking of dear ones whom the dumb turf wraps,
Dark to the triumph which they died to gain:
Fitlier may others greet the living,
For me the past is unforgiving;
I with uncovered head
Salute the sacred dead,
Who went, and who return not. — Say not so!
'Tis not the grapes of Canaan that repay,
But the high faith that failed not by the way;
Virtue treads paths that end not in the grave;
No ban of endless night exiles the brave;

And to the saner mind
We rather seem the dead that stayed behind.
Blow, trumpets, all your exultations blow!
For never shall their aureoled presence lack:
I see them muster in a gleaming row,
With ever-youthful brows that nobler show;
We find in our dull road their shining track;
In every nobler mood
We feel the orient of their spirit glow,
Part of our life's unalterable good,
Of all our saintlier aspiration;
They come transfigured back,
Secure from change in their high-hearted ways,
Beautiful evermore, and with the rays
Of morn on their white Shields of Expectation!

IX

Who now shall sneer?
Who dare again to say we trace
Our lines to a plebeian race?
Roundhead and Cavalier!
Dreams are those names erewhile in battle loud;
Forceless as is the shadow of a cloud,

They live but in the ear:
That is best blood that hath most iron in 't,
To edge resolve with, pouring without stint
For what makes manhood dear.
Tell us not of Plantagenets,
Hapsburgs, and Guelfs, whose thin bloods crawl
Down from some victor in a border-brawl!
How poor their outworn coronets,
Matched with one leaf of that plain civic wreath
Our brave for honor's blazon shall bequeath,
Through whose desert a rescued Nation sets
Her heel on treason, and the trumpet hears
Shout victory, tingling Europe's sullen ears
With vain resentments and more vain regrets!

X

Not in anger, not in pride,
Pure from passion's mixture rude,
Ever to base earth allied,
But with far-heard gratitude,
Still with heart and voice renewed,

To heroes living and dear martyrs dead,
The strain should close that consecrates our brave.
Lift the heart and lift the head!
Lofty be its mood and grave,
Not without a martial ring,
Not without a prouder tread
And a peal of exultation:
Little right has he to sing
Through whose heart in such an hour
Beats no march of conscious power,
Sweeps no tumult of elation!
'Tis no Man we celebrate,
By his country's victories great,
A hero half, and half the whim of Fate,
But the pith and marrow of a Nation
Drawing force from all her men,
Highest, humblest, weakest, all, —
Pulsing it again through them,
Till the basest can no longer cower,
Feeling his soul spring up divinely tall,
Touched but in passing by her mantle-hem.
Come back, then, noble pride, for 'tis her dower!

How could poet ever tower,
If his passions, hopes, and fears,
If his triumphs and his tears,
Kept not measure with his people?
Boom, cannon, boom to all the winds and waves!
Clash out, glad bells, from every rocking steeple!
Banners, advance with triumph, bend your staves!
And from every mountain-peak
Let beacon-fire to answering beacon speak,
Katahdin tell Monadnock, Whiteface he,
And so leap on in light from sea to sea,
Till the glad news be sent
Across a kindling continent,
Making earth feel more firm and air breathe braver:
"Be proud! for she is saved, and all have helped to save her!
She that lifts up the manhood of the poor,
She of the open soul and open door,
With room about her hearth for all mankind!

The helm from her bold front she doth unbind,
Sends all her handmaid armies back to spin,
And bids her navies hold their thunders in.
No challenge sends she to the elder world,
That looked askance and hated; a light scorn
Plays on her mouth, as round her mighty knees
She calls her children back, and waits the morn
Of nobler day, enthroned between her subject seas."

XI

Bow down, dear Land, for thou hast found release!
Thy God, in these distempered days,
Hath taught thee the sure wisdom of His ways,
And through thine enemies hath wrought thy peace!
Bow down in prayer and praise!
O Beautiful! my Country! ours once more!

Smoothing thy gold of war-dishevelled hair
O'er such sweet brows as never other wore,
And letting thy set lips,
Freed from wrath's pale eclipse,
The rosy edges of their smile lay bare,
What words divine of lover or of poet
Could tell our love and make thee know it,
Among the Nations bright beyond compare?
What were our lives without thee?
What all our lives to save thee?
We reck not what we gave thee;
We will not dare to doubt thee,
But ask whatever else, and we will dare!

NOTES

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL

1. **The Musing organist:** There is a peculiar felicity in this musical introduction. The poem is like an improvisation, and was indeed composed much as a musician improvises, with swift grasp of the subtle suggestions of musical tones. It is a dream, an elaborate and somewhat tangled metaphor, full of hidden meaning for the accordant mind, and the poet appropriately gives it a setting of music, the most symbolic of all the arts. It is an allegory, like any one of the adventures in the *Fairie Queen,* and from the very beginning the reader must be alive to the symbolic meaning, upon which Lowell, unlike Spenser, places chief emphasis, rather than upon the narrative. Compare the similar musical device in Browning's *Abt Vogler* and Adelaide Proctor's *Lost Chord.*

6. **Theme:** The theme, subject, or underlying thought of the poem is expressed in line 12 below:

"We Sinais climb and know it not;"

or more comprehensively in the group of four lines of which this is the conclusion. The organist's fingers wander listlessly over the keys at first; then come forms and figures from out of dreamland over the bridge of his careless melody, and gradually the vision takes consistent and expressive shape. So the poet comes upon his central subject, or theme, shaped from his wandering thought and imagination.

7. **Auroral flushes:** Like the first faint glimmerings of light in the East that point out the pathway of the rising

sun, the uncertain, wavering outlines of the poet's vision precede the perfected theme that is drawing near.

9. **Not only around our infancy, etc.:** The allusion is to Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, especially these lines:

> "Heave. lies about us in our infancy!
> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing Boy,
> But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
> He sees it in his joy;
> The Youth, who daily farther from the east
> Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
> And by the vision splendid
> Is on his way attended;
> At length the Man perceives it die away,
> And fade into the light of common day."

As Lowell's central theme is so intimately associated with that of Wordsworth's poem, if not directly suggested by it, the two poems should be read together and compared. Lowell maintains that "heaven lies about us" not only in our infancy, but at all times, if only we have the soul to comprehend it.

12. **We Sinais climb, etc.:** Mount Sinai was the mountain in Arabia on which Moses talked with God (*Exodus* xix, xx). God's miracles are taking place about us all the time, if only we can emancipate our souls sufficiently to see them. From out of our materialized daily lives we may rise at any moment, if we will, to ideal and spiritual things. In a letter to his nephew Lowell says: "This same name of God is written all over the world in little phenomena that occur under our eyes every moment, and I confess that I feel very much inclined to hang my head with Pizarro when I cannot translate those hieroglyphics into my own vernacular." (*Letters*, I, 164).

Compare the following passage in the poem *Bibliolatres:*

> " If thou hast wanderings in the wilderness
> And find'st not Sinai, 't is thy soul is poor;
> There towers the Mountain of the Voice no less,
> Which whoso seeks shall find, but he who bends,
> Intent on manna still and mortal ends,
> Sees it not, neither hears its thundered lore."

15. **Prophecies:** Prophecy is not only prediction, but also any inspired discourse or teaching. Compare the following lines from the poem *Freedom,* written the same year:

" Are we, then, wholly fallen? Can it be
That thou, North wind, that from thy mountains bringest
Their spirit to our plains, and thou, blue sea,
Who on our rocks thy wreaths of freedom flingest,
As on an altar, — can it be that ye
Have wasted inspiration on dead ears,
Dulled with the too familiar clank of chains? "

At the end of this poem Lowell gives his view of " fallen and traitor lives." He speaks of the " boundless future " of our country —

> " Ours if we be strong;
> Or if we shrink, better remount our ships
> And, fleeing God's express design, trace back
> The hero-freighted Mayflower's prophet-track
> To Europe entering her blood-red eclipse."

While reading *Sir Launfal* the fact must be kept in mind that Lowell was at the time of writing the poem filled with the spirit of freedom and reform, and was writing fiery articles in prose for the *Anti-Slavery Standard,* expressing his bitter indignation at the indifference and lukewarmness of the Northern people on the subject of slavery.

17. **Druid wood:** The Druids were the aged priests of the Celts, who performed their religious ceremonies in the

forests, especially among oaks, which were peculiarly sacred to them. Hence the venerable woods, like the aged priests, offer their benediction. Every power of nature, the winds, the mountain, the wood, the sea, has a symbolic meaning which we should be able to interpret for our inspiration and uplifting. Read Bryant's *A Forest Hymn*.

18. **Benedicite:** An invocation of blessing. Imperative form of the Latin *benedicere*, to bless. Longfellow speaks of the power of songs that —

> "Come like the benediction
> That follows after prayer."

19–20. Compare these lines with the ninth strophe of Wordsworth's *Ode*. The "inspiring sea" is Wordsworth's "immortal sea." Both poets rejoice that some of the impulses and ideals of youth are kept alive in old age.

21. **Earth gets its price, etc.:** Notice the special meaning given to *Earth* here, in contrast with *heaven* in line 29. Here again the thought is suggested by Wordsworth's *Ode*, sixth strophe:

> "Earth fills our lap with pleasures of her own."

23. **Shrives:** The priest shrives one when he hears confession and grants absolution.

25. **Devil's booth:** Expand this metaphor and unfold its application to every-day life.

27. **Cap and bells:** The conventional dress of the court fool, or jester, of the Middle Ages, and, after him, of the stage clown, consisted of the "fool's cap" and suit of motley, ornamented with little tinkling bells.

28. **Bubbles we buy, etc.:** This line, as first published, had "earn" for "buy."

31. This line read originally: "There is no price set," etc. The next line began with "And."

32–95. This rapturous passage descriptive of June is unquestionably the most familiar and most celebrated piece

of nature poetry in our literature. It is not only beautiful and inspiring in its felicitous phrasings of external nature, but it is especially significant as a true expression of the heart and soul of the poet himself. It was always "the high-tide of the year" with Lowell in June, when his spirits were in fine accord with the universal joy of nature. Wherever in his poetry he refers to spring and its associations, he always expresses the same ecstasy of delight. The passage must be compared with the opening lines of *Under the Willows* (which he at first named *A June Idyll*):

"June is the pearl of our New England year.
Still a surprisal, though expected long,
Her coming startles. Long she lies in wait,
Makes many a feint, peeps forth, draws coyly back,
Then, from some southern ambush in the sky,
With one great gush of blossom storms the world," etc.

And in *Sunthin' in the Pastoral Line* the coming of spring is delightfully pictured:

"Our Spring gets everything in tune
An' gives one leap from April into June," etc.

In a letter written in June, 1867, Lowell says: "There never *is* such a season, and that shows what a poet God is. He says the same thing over to us so often and always new. Here I've been reading the same poem for near half a century, and never had a notion what the buttercup in the third stanza meant before."

It is worth noting that Lowell's happy June corresponds to May in the English poets, as in Wordsworth's *Ode:*

"With the heart of May
Doth every beast keep holiday."

In New England where "Northern natur" is "slow an' apt to doubt,"

"May is a pious fraud of the almanac."

or as Hosea Biglow says:

"Half our May is so awfully like May n't,
'T would rile a Shaker or an evrige saint."

41. The original edition has "grasping" instead of "groping."

42. **Climbs to a soul, etc.:** In his intimate sympathy with nature, Lowell endows her forms with conscious life, as Wordsworth did, who says in *Lines Written in Early Spring:*

"And 't is my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes."

So Lowell in *The Cathedral* says:

"And I believe the brown earth takes delight
In the new snow-drop looking back at her,
To think that by some vernal alchemy
It could transmute her darkness into pearl."

So again he says in *Under the Willows:*

"I in June am midway to believe
A tree among my far progenitors,
Such sympathy is mine with all the race,
Such mutual recognition vaguely sweet
There is between us."

It must be remembered that this humanizing of nature is an attitude toward natural objects characteristic only of modern poetry, being practically unknown in English poetry before the period of Burns and Wordsworth.

45. **The cowslip startles:** Surprises the eye with its bright patches of green sprinkled with golden blossoms. *Cowslip* is the common name in New England for the marsh-marigold, which appears early in spring in low wet meadows, and

furnishes not infrequently a savory "mess of greens" for the farmer's dinner-table.

46. Compare *Al Fresco*, lines 34–39:

> "The rich, milk-tingeing buttercup
> Its tiny polished urn holds up,
> Filled with ripe summer to the edge,
> The sun in his own wine to pledge."

56. **Nice:** Delicately discriminating.

62. This line originally read "because God so wills it."

71. **Maize has sprouted:** There is an anxious period for the farmer after his corn is planted, for if the spring is "backward" and the weather cold, his seed may decay in the ground before sprouting.

73. So in *Sunthin' in the Pastoral Line*, when robin-redbreast sees the "hossches'nuts' leetle hands unfold" he knows —

> "Thet arter this ther' 's only blossom-snows;
> So, choosin' out a handy crotch an' spouse,
> He goes to plast'rin' his adobë house."

77. Note the happy effect of the internal rhyme in this line.

93. **Healed with snow:** Explain the appropriateness of the metaphor.

94–95. Is the transition here from the prelude to the story abrupt, or do the preceding lines lead up to it appropriately? Just why does Sir Launfal now remember his vow? Do these lines introduce the "theme" that the musing organist has finally found in dreamland, or the symbolic illustration of his theme?

97. **Richest mail:** The knight's coat of mail was usually of polished steel, often richly decorated with inlaid patterns of gold and jewels. To serve his high purpose, Sir Launfal brings forth his most precious treasures.

99. **Holy Grail:** According to medieval legend, the Sangreal was the cup or chalice, made of emerald, which was used by Christ at the last supper, and in which Joseph of Arimathea caught the last drops of Christ's blood when he was taken down from the cross. The quest of the Grail is the central theme of the Arthurian Romances. Tennyson's *Holy Grail* should be read, and the student should also be made familiar with the beautiful versions of the legend in Abbey's series of mural paintings in the Boston Public Library, and in Wagner's *Parsifal.*

103. **On the rushes:** In ancient halls and castles the floors were commonly strewn with rushes. In *Taming of the Shrew*, when preparing for the home-coming of Petruchio and his bride, Grumio says: "Is supper ready, the house trimmed, rushes strewed, cobwebs swept?"

109. **The crows flapped, etc.:** Suggestive of the quiet, heavy flight of the crow in a warm day. The beginning and the end of the stanza suggest drowsy quiet. The vision begins in this stanza. The nature pictures are continued, but with new symbolical meaning.

114. **Like an outpost of winter:** The cold, gloomy castle stands in strong contrast to the surrounding landscape filled with the joyous sunshine of summer. So the proud knight's heart is still inaccessible to true charity and warm human sympathy. So aristocracy in its power and pride stands aloof from democracy with its humility and aspiration for human brotherhood. This stanza is especially figurative. The poet is unfolding the main theme, the underlying moral purpose, of the whole poem, but it is still kept in vague, dreamy symbolism.

116. **North Countree:** The north of England, the home of the border ballads. This form of the word "countree," with accent on the last syllable, is common in the old ballads. Here it gives a flavor of antiquity in keeping with the story.

122. **Pavilions tall:** The trees, as in line 125, the broad green tents. Note how the military figure, beginning with

"outposts," in line 115, is continued and developed throughout the stanza, and reverted to in the word "siege" in the next stanza.

130. **Maiden knight:** A young, untried, unpracticed knight. The expression occurs in Tennyson's *Sir Galahad.* So "maiden mail" below.

137. **As a locust-leaf:** The small delicate leaflets of the compound locust-leaf seem always in a "lightsome" movement.

138. The original edition has "unscarred mail."

138 139. Compare the last lines of Tennyson's *Sir Galahad:*

> "By bridge and ford, by park and pale,
> All-armed I ride, whate'er betide,
> Until I find the Holy Grail."

147. **Made morn:** Let in the morning, or came into the full morning light as the huge gate opened.

148. **Leper:** Why did the poet make the crouching beggar a leper?

152. For "gan shrink" the original has "did shrink."

155. **Bent of stature:** Criticise this phrase.

158. **So he tossed . . . in scorn:** This is the turning-point of the moral movement of the story. Sir Launfal at the very beginning makes his fatal mistake; his noble spirit and lofty purposes break down with the first test. He refuses to see a brother in the loathsome leper; the light and warmth of human brotherhood had not yet entered his soul, just as the summer sunshine had not entered the frowning castle. The regeneration of his soul must be worked out through wandering and suffering. Compare the similar plot of the *Ancient Mariner.*

163. **No true alms:** The alms must also be in the heart.

164. Originally "He gives nothing but worthless gold."

166. **Slender mite:** An allusion to the widow's "two mites." (*Luke* xxi, 1–4.)

168. **The all-sustaining Beauty:** The all-pervading spirit of God that unites all things in one sympathetic whole. This

divinity in humanity is its highest beauty. In *The Oak* Lowell says:

> "Lord! all thy works are lessons; each contains
> Some emblem of man's all-containing soul."

172. **A god goes with it:** The god-like quality of real charity, of heart to heart sympathy. In a letter written a little after the composition of this poem Lowell speaks of love and freedom as being "the sides which Beauty presented to him then."

172. **Store:** Plenty, abundance.

175. **Summers:** What is gained by the use of this word instead of winters?

176. **Wold:** A high, open and barren field that catches the full sweep of the wind. The "wolds" of north England are like the "downs" of the south.

181. **The little brook:** In a letter written in December, 1848, Lowell says: "Last night I walked to Watertown over the snow with the new moon before me and a sky exactly like that in Page's evening landscape. Orion was rising behind me, and, as I stood on the hill just before you enter the village, the stillness of the fields around me was delicious, broken only by the tinkle of a little brook which runs too swiftly for Frost to catch it. My picture of the brook in *Sir Launfal* was drawn from it." See the poem *Beaver Brook* (originally called *The Mill*), and the winter picture in *An Indian-Summer Reverie*, lines 148–196.

184. **Groined:** Groined arches are formed by the intersection of two arches crossing at any angle, forming a ribbed vault; a characteristic feature of Gothic architecture.

190. **Forest-crypt:** The crypt of a church is the basement, filled with arched pillars that sustain the building. The cavern of the brook, as the poet will have us imagine it, is like this subterranean crypt, where the pillars are like trees and the groined arches like interlacing branches, decorated with frost leaves. The poet seems to have had in mind

throughout the description the interior of the Gothic cathedrals, as shown by the many suggestive terms used, "groined," "crypt," "aisles," "fretwork," and "carvings."

193. **Fretwork:** The ornamental work carved in intricate patterns, in oak or stone, on the ceilings of old halls and churches.

195. **Sharp relief:** When a figure stands out prominently from the marble or other material from which it is cut, it is said to be in "high relief," in distinction from "low relief," *bas relief*.

196. **Arabesques:** Complicated patterns of interwoven foliage, flowers and fruits, derived from Arabian art. Lowell had undoubtedly studied many times the frost designs on the window panes.

201. **That crystalled the beams, etc.:** That caught the beams of moon and sun as in a crystal. For "that" the original edition has "which."

204. **Winter-palace of ice:** An allusion, apparently, to the ice-palace built by the Empress of Russia, Catherine II, "most magnificent and mighty freak. The wonder of the North," Cowper called it. Compare Lowell's description of the frost work with Cowper's similar description in *The Task*, in the beginning of Book V.

205–210. **'Twas as if every image, etc.:** Note the exquisite fancy in these lines. The elves have preserved in the ice the pictures of summer foliage and clouds that were mirrored in the water as models for another summer.

211. **The hall:** In the old castles the hall was always the large banqueting room, originally the common living room. Here all large festivities would take place.

213. **Corbel:** A bracket-like support projecting from a wall from which an arch springs or on which a beam rests. The poet has in mind an ancient hall in which the ceiling is the exposed woodwork of the roof.

214. This line at first read: "With the lightsome," etc. Why did Lowell's refining taste strike out "the"?

216. **Yule-log:** The great log, sometimes the root of a tree, burned in the huge fireplace on Christmas eve, with special ceremonies and merrymakings. It was lighted with a brand preserved from the last year's log, and connected with its burning were many quaint superstitions and customs. The celebration is a survival through our Scandinavian ancestors of the winter festival in honor of the god Thor. Herrick describes it trippingly in one of his songs:

"Come, bring with a noise,
My merrie, merrie boys,
The Christmas log to the firing;
While my good dame, she
Bids ye all be free,
And drink to your heart's desiring."

219. **Like a locust, etc.:** Only one who has heard both sounds frequently can appreciate the close truth of this simile. The metaphors and similes in this stanza are deserving of special study.

226. **Harp:** Prof. William Vaughn Moody questions whether "the use of Sir Launfal's hair as a 'harp' for the wind to play a Christmas carol on" is not "a bit grotesque." Does the picture of Sir Launfal in these two stanzas belong in the Prelude or in the story in Part Second?

230. **Carol of its own:** Contrasted with the carols that are being sung inside the castle.

231. **Burden:** The burden or refrain is the part repeated at the end of each stanza of a ballad or song, expressing the main theme or sentiment. *Still* is in the sense of always, ever.

233. **Seneschal:** An officer of the castle who had charge of feasts and ceremonies, like the modern Lord Chamberlain of the King's palace. Note the effect of the striking figure in this line.

237. **Window-slits:** Narrow perpendicular openings in

the wall, serving both as windows and as loopholes from which to fire at an enemy.

238. **Build out its piers:** The beams of light are like the piers or jetties that extend out from shore into the water to protect ships. Such piers are also built out to protect the shore from the violent wash of the ocean. The poet may possibly, however, have had in mind the piers of a bridge that support the arches and stand against the sweep of the stream.

243. In this line instead of "the weaver Winter" the original has "the frost's swift shuttles." Was the change an improvement?

244. **A single crow:** Note the effect of introducing this lone crow into the bleak landscape.

250. It must not be forgotten that this old Sir Launfal is only in the dream of the real Sir Launfal, who is still lying on the rushes within his own castle. As the poor had often been turned away with cold, heartless selfishness, so he is now turned away from his own "hard gate."

251. **Sate:** The use of this archaic form adds to the antique flavor of the poem. So with the use of the word "tree" for cross, in line 281 below. Lowell was passionately fond of the old poets and the quaint language of the early centuries of English literature, and loved to introduce into his own poetry words and phrases from these sources. Of this habit he says:

> "If some small savor creep into my rhyme
> Of the old poets, if some words I use,
> Neglected long, which have the lusty thews
> Of that gold-haired and earnest-hearted time,
> Whose loving joy and sorrow all sublime
> Have given our tongue its starry eminence, —
> It is not pride, God knows, but reverence
> Which hath grown in me since my childhood's prime."

254. **Recked:** Cared for.

255. **Surcoat:** A long flowing garment worn over the armor, on which was "emblazoned" the coat of arms. If the knight were a crusader, a red cross was embroidered thus on the surcoat.

256. **The sign:** The sign of the cross, the symbol of humility and love. This is the first real intimation, the keynote, of the transformation that has taken place in Sir Launfal's soul.

259. **Idle mail:** Useless, ineffectual protection. This figure carries us back to the "gilded mail," line 131, in which Sir Launfal "flashed forth" at the beginning of his quest. The poem is full of these minor antitheses, which should be traced by the student.

264–272. **He sees, etc.:** This description is not only beautiful in itself, but it serves an important purpose in the plan of the poem. It is a kind of condensation or symbolic expression of Sir Launfal's many years of wandering in oriental lands. The hint or brief outline is given, which must be expanded by the imagination of the reader. Otherwise the story would be inconsistent and incomplete. Notice how deftly the picture is introduced.

272. **Signal of palms:** A group of palm trees seen afar off over the desert is a welcome signal of an oasis with water for the relief of the suffering traveler. Some critics have objected that so small a spring could not have "waved" so large a signal!

273. Notice the abruptness with which the leper is here introduced, just as before at the beginning of the story. The vision of "a sunnier clime" is quickly swept away. The shock of surprise now has a very different effect upon Sir Launfal.

275. This line at first read: "But Sir Launfal sees naught save the grewsome thing."

278. **White:** "And, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow." (*Numbers* xii, 10.)

279. **Desolate horror:** The adjective suggests the out-

cast, isolated condition of lepers. They were permitted no contact with other people. The ten lepers who met Jesus in Samaria "stood afar off and lifted up their voices."

281. **On the tree:** On the cross. "Whom they slew and hanged on a tree, Him God raised up the third day." (*Acts* x, 39.) This use of the word is common in early literature, especially in the ballads.

285. See *John* xx, 25–27.

287. **Through him:** The leper. Note that the address is changed in these two lines. Compare *Matthew* xxv, 34–40. This gift to the leper differs how from the gift in Part First?

291 **Leprosie:** The antiquated spelling is used for the perfect rhyme and to secure the antique flavor.

292. **Girt:** The original word here was "caged."

294. **Ashes and dust:** Explain the metaphor. Compare with "sackcloth and ashes." See *Esther* iv, 3; *Jonah* iii, 6; *Job* ii, 8.

300, 301. The figurative character of the lines is emphasized by the word "soul" at the end. The miracle of Cana seems to have been in the poet's mind.

304, 305. The leper is transfigured and Christ himself appears in the vision of the sleeping Sir Launfal.

307. **The Beautiful Gate:** "The gate of the temple which is called Beautiful," where Peter healed the lame man. (*Acts* iii, 2.)

308. **Himself the Gate:** See *John* x, 7, 9: "I am the door."

310. **Temple of God:** "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (*I Corinthians* iii, 16, 17; vi, 19.)

312. This line at first began with "which."

313. **Shaggy:** Is this term applicable to Sir Launfal's present condition, or is the whole simile carried a little beyond the point of true likeness?

314. **Softer:** Lowell originally wrote "calmer" here. The change increased the effect of the alliteration. Was it otherwise an improvement?

315. **Lo, it is I:** *John* vi, 20.

316. **Without avail:** Was Sir Launfal's long quest entirely without avail? Compare the last lines of Tennyson's *Holy Grail*, where Arthur complains that his knights who went upon the Holy Quest have followed "wandering fires, lost in the quagmire," and "leaving human wrongs to right themselves."

320, 321. *Matthew* xxvi, 26–28; *Mark* xiv, 22–24.

322. **Holy Supper:** The Last Supper of Christ and his disciples, upon which is instituted the communion service of the churches. The spirit of the Holy Supper, the communion of true brotherhood, is realized when the Christlike spirit triumphs in the man. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (*Matthew* xxv, 40.)

326. The original has "bestows" for "gives."

328. **Swound:** The antiquated form of *swoon*.

332, 333. Interpret the lines. Did the poet have in mind the spiritual armor described in *Ephesians* vi, 11 17?

336. **Hangbird:** The oriole, so called from its hanging nest; one of Lowell's most beloved "garden acquaintances" at Elmwood. In a letter he says: "They build a pendulous nest, and so flash in the sun that our literal rustics call them fire hang-birds." See the description in *Under the Willows* beginning:

"My oriole, my glance of summer fire."

See also the charming prose description in *My Garden Acquaintance*.

338. **Summer's long siege at last is o'er:** The return to this figure rounds out the story and serves to give unity to the plan of the poem. The siege is successful, summer has conquered and entered the castle, warming and lighting its cold, cheerless interior.

342, 343. Is Lowell expressing here his own convictions about ideal democracy?

THE SHEPHERD OF KING ADMETUS

Apollo, the god of music, having given offense to Zeus, was condemned to serve for the space of one year as a shepherd under Admetus, King of Thessaly. This is one of the most charming of the myths of Apollo, and has been often used by the poets. Remarking upon this poem, and others of its period, Scudder says that it shows "how persistently in Lowell's mind was present this aspect of the poet which makes him a seer," a recognition of an "all-embracing, all-penetrating power which through the poet transmutes nature into something finer and more eternal, and gives him a vantage ground from which to perceive more truly the realities of life." Compare with this poem *An Incident in a Railroad Car*.

5. **Lyre:** According to mythology, Apollo's lyre was a tortoise-shell strung with seven strings.

8. **Fagots for a witch:** The introduction of this witch element into a Greek legend rather mars the consistency of the poem. Lowell finally substituted for the stanza the following:

> "Upon an empty tortoise-shell
> He stretched some chords, and drew
> Music that made men's bosoms swell
> Fearless, or brimmed their eyes with dew."

HEBE

Lowell suggests in this dainty symbolical lyric his conception of the poet's inspiration. Hebe was cup-bearer to the gods of Olympus, in Greek mythology, and poured for them their nectar. She was also the goddess of eternal youth. By an extension of the symbolism she becomes goddess of the eternal joyousness of the poetic gift. The "influence fleet" is the divine afflatus that fills the creative mind of the poet.

But Pegasus cannot be made to work in harness at will. True inspiration comes only in choice moments. Coy Hebe cannot be wooed violently. Elsewhere he says of the muse:

> "Harass her not; thy heat and stir
> But greater coyness breed in her."

"Follow thy life," he says, "be true to thy best self, then Hebe will bring her choicest ambrosia." That is —

> "Make thyself rich, and then the Muse
> Shall court thy precious interviews,
> Shall take thy head upon her knee,
> And such enchantment lilt to thee,
> That thou shalt hear the life-blood flow
> From farthest stars to grass-blades low."

TO THE DANDELION

Four stanzas were added to this poem after its first appearance, the sixth, seventh, eighth and tenth, but in the finally revised edition these were cut out, very likely because Lowell regarded them as too didactic. Indeed the poem is complete and more artistic without them.

"Of Lowell's earlier pieces," says Stedman, "the one which shows the finest sense of the poetry of nature is that addressed *To the Dandelion*. The opening phrase ranks with the selectest of Wordsworth and Keats, to whom imaginative diction came intuitively, and both thought and language are felicitous throughout. This poem contains many of its author's peculiar beauties and none of his faults; it was the outcome of the mood that can summon a rare spirit of art to express the gladdest thought and most elusive feeling."

6. **Eldorado:** The land of gold, supposed to be somewhere in South America, which the European adventurers, especially the Spaniards, were constantly seeking in the sixteenth century.

26. Sybaris: An ancient Greek colony in southern Italy whose inhabitants were devoted to luxury and pleasure.

52–54. Compare *Sir Launfal.*

MY LOVE

Lowell's love for Maria White is beautifully enshrined in this little poem. He wrote it at about the time of their engagement. While it is thus personal in its origin, it is universal in its expression of ideal womanhood, and so has a permanent interest and appeal. In its strong simplicity and crystal purity of style, it is a little masterpiece. Though filled with the passion of his new and beautiful love, its movement is as calm and artistically restrained as that of one of Wordsworth's best lyrics.

THE CHANGELING

This is one of the tender little poems that refer to the death of the poet's daughter Blanche, which occurred in March, 1847. *The First Snow-fall* and *She Came and Went* embody the same personal grief. When sending the former to his friend Sydney H. Gay for publication, he wrote: "May you never have the key which shall unlock the whole meaning of the poem to you." Underwood, in his *Biographical Sketch* says that "friends of the poet, who were admitted to the study in the upper chamber, remember the pairs of baby shoes that hung over a picture-frame." The volume in which this poem first appeared contained this dedication — "To the ever fresh and happy memory of our little Blanche this volume is reverently dedicated."

A changeling, according to folk-lore and fairy tale, is a fairy child that the fairies substitute for a human child that they have stolen. The changeling was generally sickly, shrivelled and in every way repulsive. Here the poet reverses the superstition, substituting the angels for the mis-

chievous fairies, who bring an angel child in place of the lost one. Whittier has a poem on the same theme, *The Changeling*.

29. **Zingari:** The Gypsies — suggested by "wandering angels" above — who wander about the earth, and also sometimes steal children, according to popular belief.

52. **Bliss it:** A rather violent use of the word, not recognized by the dictionaries, but nevertheless felicitous.

AN INDIAN-SUMMER REVERIE

Lowell's love of Elmwood and its surroundings finds expression everywhere in his writings, both prose and verse, but nowhere in a more direct, personal manner than in this poem. He was not yet thirty when the poem was written, and Cambridge could still be called a "village," but the familiar scenes already had their retrospective charms, which increased with the passing years. Later in life he again celebrated his affection for this home environment in *Under the Willows*.

"There are poetic lines and phrases in the poem," says Scudder, "and more than all the veil of the season hangs tremulously over the whole, so that one is gently stirred by the poetic feeling of the rambling verses; yet, after all, the most enduring impression is of the young man himself in that still hour of his life, when he was conscious, not so much of a reform to which he must put his hand, as of the love of beauty, and of the vague melancholy which mingles with beauty in the soul of a susceptible poet. The river winding through the marshes, the distant sound of the ploughman, the near chatter of the chipmunk, the individual trees, each living its own life, the march of the seasons flinging lights and shadows over the broad scene, the pictures of human life associated with his own experience, the hurried survey of his village years — all these pictures float before his vision; and then, with an abruptness which is like the choking of

the singer's voice with tears, there wells up the thought of the little life which held as in one precious drop the love and faith of his heart."

1. **Visionary tints:** The term Indian summer is given to almost any autumnal period of exceptionally quiet, dry and hazy weather. In America these characteristic features of late fall were especially associated with the middle West, at a time when the Indians occupied that region.

5. **Hebe:** Hebe was cup-bearer to the gods at their feasts on Olympus. Like Hebe, Autumn fills the sloping fields, rimmed round with distant hills, with her own delicious atmosphere of dreamy and poetic influence.

11. **My own projected spirit:** It seems to the poet that his own spirit goes out to the world, steeping it in reverie like his own, rather than receiving the influence from nature's mood.

25. **Gleaning Ruth:** For the story of Ruth's gleaning in the fields of Boaz, see the book of *Ruth*, ii.

38. **Chipmunk:** Lowell at first had "squirrel" here, which would be inconsistent with the "underground fastness." And yet, are chipmunks seen up in walnut trees?

40. This line originally read, "with a chipping bound." *Cheeping* is chirping, or giving the peculiar cluck that sounds like "cheep," or "chip."

45. **Faint as smoke, etc.:** The farmer burns the stubble and other refuse of the season before his "fall plowing."

46. **The single crow, etc.:** Note the full significance of this detail of the picture. Compare Bryant's *Death of the Flowers:*

"And from the wood-top calls the crow through all the gloomy day."

50. Compare with this stanza the pretty little poem, *The Birch Tree.*

68. **Lavish of their long-hid gold:** The chestnut leaves.

it will be remembered, turn to a bright golden yellow in autumn. These descriptions of autumn foliage are all as true as beautiful.

73. **Maple-swamps:** We generally speak of the swamp-maple, which grows in low ground, and has particularly brilliant foliage in autumn.

82. **Tangled blackberry:** This is the creeping blackberry, of course, which every one remembers whose feet have been caught in its prickly tangles.

91. **Martyr oak:** The oak is surrounded with the blazing foliage of the ivy, like a burning martyr.

99. **Dear marshes:** The Charles River near Elmwood winds through broad salt marshes, the characteristic features of which Lowell describes with minute and loving fidelity

127. **Bobolink:** If Lowell had a favorite bird, it was the bobolink, although the oriole was a close competitor for his praises. In one of his letters he says: "I think the bobolink the best singer in the world, even undervaluing the lark and the nightingale in the comparison." And in another he writes: "That liquid tinkle of theirs is the true fountain of youth if one can only drink it with the right ears, and I always date the New Year from the day of my first draught. Messer Roberto di Lincoln, with his summer alb over his shoulders, is the true chorister for the bridals of earth and sky. There is no bird that seems to me so thoroughly happy as he, so void of all *arrière pensée* about getting a livelihood. The robin sings matins and vespers somewhat conscientiously, it seems to me — makes a business of it and pipes as it were by the yard — but Bob squanders song like a poet."

Compare the description in *Sunthin' in the Pastoral Line:*

> "'Nuff said, June's bridesman, poet o' the year,
> Gladness on wings, the bobolink, is here;
> Half hid in tip-top apple-blooms he swings,

Or climbs aginst the breeze with quiverin' wings,
Or, givin' way to 't in a mock despair,
Runs down, a brook o' laughter, thru the air."

See also the opening lines of *Under the Willows* for another description full of the ecstasy of both bird and poet. The two passages woven together appear in the essay *Cambridge Thirty Years Ago*, as a quotation. An early poem on *The Bobolink*, delightful and widely popular, was omitted from later editions of his poems by Lowell, perhaps because to his maturer taste the theme was too much moralized in his early manner. "Shelley and Wordsworth," says Mr. Brownell, "have not more worthily immortalized the skylark than Lowell has the bobolink, its New England congener."

134. **Another change:** The description now returns to the marshes.

147. **Simond's hill:** In the essay *Cambridge Thirty Years Ago* Lowell describes the village as seen from the top of this hill.

159–161. An allusion to the Mexican War, against which Lowell was directing the satire of the *Bigłow Papers*.

174–182. Compare the winter pictures in Whittier's *Snowbound*.

177. **Formal candles:** Candles lighted for some form or ceremony, as in a religious service.

192. **Stonehenge:** Stonehenge on Salisbury plain in the south of England is famous for its huge blocks of stone now lying in confusion, supposed to be the remains of an ancient Druid temple.

207. **Sanding:** The continuance of the metaphor in "higher waves" are "whelming." With high waves the sand is brought in upon the land, encroaching upon its limits.

209. **Muses' factories:** The buildings of Harvard College.

218. **House-bespotted swell:** Lowell notes with some resentment the change from nature's simple beauties to

the pretentiousness of wealth shown in incongruous buildings.

220. **Cits:** Contracted from citizens. During the French Revolution, when all titles were abolished, the term *citizen* was applied to every one, to denote democratic simplicity and equality.

223. **Gentle Allston:** Washington Allston, the celebrated painter, whom Lowell describes as he remembered him in the charming essay *Cambridge Thirty Years Ago*.

225. **Virgilium vidi tantum:** I barely saw Virgil — caught a glimpse of him — a phrase applied to any passing glimpse of greatness.

227. **Undine-like:** Undine, a graceful water nymph, is the heroine of the charming little romantic story by De la Motte Fouqué.

234. **The village blacksmith:** See Longfellow's famous poem, *The Village Blacksmith*. The chestnut was cut down in 1876. An arm-chair made from its wood still stands in the Longfellow house, a gift to Longfellow from the Cambridge school children.

254. **Six old willows:** These much-loved trees afforded Lowell a subject for a later poem *Under the Willows*, in which he describes particularly one ancient willow that had been spared, he "knows not by what grace," by the ruthless "New World subduers" —

> "One of six, a willow Pleiades,
> The seventh fallen, that lean along the brink
> Where the steep upland dips into the marsh."

In a letter written twenty years after the *Reverie* to J. T. Fields, Lowell says: "My heart was almost broken yesterday by seeing nailed to *my* willow a board with these words on it, 'These trees for sale.' The wretch is going to peddle them for firewood! If I had the money, I would buy the piece of ground they stand on to save them — the dear friends of a lifetime."

255. **Paul Potter:** One of the most famous of the Dutch painters of the seventeenth century, notable for the strong realism of his work.

264. **Collegisse juvat:** The full sentence, in the first ode of Horace, reads, "Curriculo pulverem Olympicum collegisse juvat." (It is a pleasure to have collected the dust of Olympus on one's chariot wheels.) The allusion is to the Olympic games, the most celebrated festival of Greece. Lowell puns upon the word *collegisse* with his own coinage, which may have the double meaning of *going to college* and *collecting*.

272. **Blinding anguish:** An allusion to the death of his little daughter Blanche. See *The Changeling*, *The First Snow-fall*, and *She Came and Went*.

THE OAK

11. **Uncinctured front:** The forehead no longer encircled with a crown.

13–16. There is a little confusion in the figures here, the cathedral part of the picture being a little far fetched.

40. **Mad Pucks:** Puck is the frolicsome, mischief-making spirit of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

45. **Dodona grove:** The grove of oaks at Dodona was the seat of a famous Greek oracle, whose responses were whispered through the murmuring foliage of the trees.

BEAVER BROOK

Beaver Brook at Waverley was a favorite resort of Lowell's and it is often mentioned in his writings. In summer and winter it was the frequent goal of his walks. The poem was at first called *The Mill*. It was first published in the *Anti-Slavery Standard*, and to the editor, Sidney H. Gay, Lowell wrote: — "Don't you like the poem I sent you last week? I was inclined to think pretty well of it, but I have not seen

it in print yet. The little mill stands in a valley between one of the spurs of Wellington Hill and the main summit, just on the edge of Waltham. It is surely one of the loveliest spots in the world. It is one of my lions, and if you will make me a visit this spring, I will take you up to hear it roar, and I will show you 'the oaks' — the largest, I fancy, left in the country."

21. **Undine:** In mythology and romance, Undine is a water-spirit who is endowed with a soul by her marriage with a mortal. The *race* is the watercourse conducted from the dam in an open trough or "penstock" to the wheel.

45. **In that new childhood of the Earth:** This poem was written a few weeks after the *Vision of Sir Launfal* was published, and it therefore naturally partakes of its idealism.

THE PRESENT CRISIS

This poem was written in 1844. The discussion over the annexation of Texas was absorbing public attention. The anti-slavery party opposed annexation, believing that it would strengthen the slave-holding interests, and for the same reason the South was urging the scheme. Lowell wrote several very strong anti-slavery poems at this time, *To W. L. Garrison, Wendell Phillips, On the Death of C. T. Torrey,* and others, which attracted attention to him as a new and powerful ally of the reform party. "These poems," says George William Curtis, "especially that on *The Present Crisis,* have a Tyrtæan resonance, a stately rhetorical rhythm, that make their dignity of thought, their intense feeling, and picturesque imagery, superbly effective in recitation. They sang themselves on every anti-slavery platform."

While the poem was inspired by the political struggle of the time, which Lowell regarded as a crisis in the history of our national honor and progress, its chief strength is due to the fact that its lofty sentiment is universal in its appeal, and not applicable merely to temporal and local conditions

17. Round the earth's electric circle, etc.: This prophetic figure was doubtless suggested by the first telegraph line, which Samuel F. B. Morse had just erected between Baltimore and Washington.

37. **The Word:** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (*John* i. 1.)

44. **Delphic cave:** The oracle at Delphi was the most famous and authoritative among the Greeks. The priestess who voiced the answers of the god was seated in a natural fissure in the rocks.

46. **Cyclops:** The Cyclopes were brutish giants with one eye who lived in caverns and fed on human flesh, if the opportunity offered. Lowell is recalling in these lines the adventure of Ulysses with the Cyclops, in the ninth book of Homer's *Odyssey*.

64. **Credo:** Latin, I believe: the first word in the Latin version of the Apostles' Creed, hence used for *creed*.

THE COURTIN'

This poem first appeared as "a short fragment of a pastoral," in the introduction to the First Series of the *Biglow Papers*. It is said to have been composed merely to fill a blank page, but its popularity was so great that Lowell expanded it to twice its original length, and finally printed it as a kind of introduction to the Second Series of the *Biglow Papers*. It first appeared, however, in its expanded form in a charitable publication, *Autograph Leaves of Our Country's Authors*, reproduced in facsimile from the original manuscript.

"This bucolic idyl," says Stedman, "is without a counterpart; no richer juice can be pressed from the wild grape of the Yankee soil." Greenslet thinks that this poem is "perhaps the most nearly perfect of his poems."

17. Crooknecks: Crookneck squashes.

19. **Ole queen's-arm**: The old musket brought from the Concord fight in 1775.

32. To draw a straight furrow when plowing is regarded as evidence of a skilful farmer.

36. **All is**: The truth is, "all there is about it."

37. **Long o' her**: Along of her, on account of her.

40. **South slope**: The slope of a hill facing south catches the spring sunshine.

43. **Ole Hunderd**: Old Hundred is one of the most familiar of the old hymn tunes.

58. Somewhat doubtful as to the sequel.

94. **Eay o' Fundy**: The Bay of Fundy is remarkable for its high and violent tides, owing to the peculiar conformation of its banks.

96. **Was cried**: The "bans" were cried, the announcement of the engagement in the church, according to the custom of that day.

THE COMMEMORATION ODE

The poem was dedicated "To the ever sweet and shining memory of the ninety-three sons of Harvard College who have died for their country in the war of nationality." The text of the poem is here given as Lowell first published it in 1865. He afterward made a few verbal changes, and added one new strophe after the eighth. There is a special interest in studying the ode in the form in which it came rushing from the poet's brain.

1–14. The deeds of the poet are weak and trivial compared with the deeds of heroes. They live their high ideals and die for them. Yet the gentle words of the poet may sometimes save unusual lives from that oblivion to which all common lives are destined.

5. **Robin's-leaf**: An allusion to the ballad of the *Babes in the Wood*.

9. **Squadron-strophes**: The term *strophe* originally was

applied to a metrical form that was repeated in a certain established way, like the *strophe* and *antistrophe* of the Greek ode, as sung by a divided chorus; it is now applied to any stanza form. The poem of heroism is a "battle-ode," whose successive stanzas are marching squadrons, whose verses are lines of blazing guns, and whose melody is the strenuous music of "trump and drum."

13. **Lethe's dreamless ooze:** Lethe is the river of oblivion in Hades; its slimy depths of forgetfulness are not even disturbed by dreams.

14. **Unventurous throng:** The vast majority of commonplace beings who neither achieve nor attempt deeds of "high emprise."

16. **Wisest Scholars:** Many students who had returned from the war were in the audience, welcomed back by their revered mother, their Alma Mater.

20. **Peddling:** Engaging in small, trifling interests. Lowell's attitude toward science is that of Wordsworth, when he speaks of the dry-souled scientist as one who is all eyes and no heart, "One that would peep and botanize Upon his mother's grave."

21. The pseudo-science of astrology, seeking to tell commonplace fortunes by the stars.

25–26. **Clear fame:** Compare Milton's *Lycidas:*

> "Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
> . . . . . .
> To scorn delights and live laborious days."

32. **Half-virtues:** Is Lowell disparaging the virtues of peace and home in comparison with the heroic virtues of war? Or are these "half-virtues" contrasted with the loftier virtue, the devotion to Truth?

34. **That stern device:** The seal of Harvard College, chosen by its early founders, bears the device of a shield with the word *Ve-ri-tas* (truth) upon three open books.

46. **Sad faith:** Deep, serious faith, or there may be a

slight touch of irony in the word, with a glance at the gloomy faith of early puritanism and its "lifeless creed" (l. 62).

62. **Lifeless creed:** Compare Tennyson's:

"Ancient form
Thro' which the spirit breathes no more."

73. The tide of the ocean in its flow and ebb is under the influence of the moon. To get the sense of the metaphor, "fickle" must be read with "Fortune" — unless, perchance, we, like Juliet, regard the moon as the "inconstant moon."

81. To protect one's self everyone connives against everyone else. Compare *Sir Launfal*, l. 11. Instead of climbing Sinais we "cringe and plot."

82. Compare *Sir Launfal*, l. 26. The whole passage, ll. 76–87, is a distant echo of the second and third stanzas of *Sir Launfal*.

83–85. **Puppets:** The puppets are the pasteboard actors in the Punch and Judy show, operated by unseen wires.

84. An echo of *Macbeth*, V, 5:

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more."

97. **Elder than the Day:** Elder than the first Day. "And God called the light Day," etc. (*Genesis* i, 5.) We may have light from the divine fountains.

110–114. In shaping this elaborate battle metaphor, one can easily believe the poet to have had in mind some fierce mountain struggle during the war, such as the battle of Lookout Mountain.

111. **Creeds:** Here used in the broad sense of convictions, principles, beliefs.

115–118. The construction is faulty in these lines. The two last clauses should be co-ordinated. The substance of the meaning is: Peace has her wreath, while the cannon are silent and while the sword slumbers. Lowell's attention

was called to this defective passage by T. W. Higginson, and he replied: "Your criticism is perfectly just, and I am much obliged to you for it — though I might defend myself, I believe, by some constructions even looser in some of the Greek choruses. But on the whole, when I have my choice, I prefer to make sense." He then suggested an emendation, which somehow failed to get into the published poem:

"Ere yet the sharp, decisive word
Redden the cannon's lips, and while the sword."

120. **Baäl's stone obscene:** Human sacrifices were offered on the altars of Baäl. (*Jeremiah* xix, 5.)

147–205. This strophe was not in the ode as delivered, but was written immediately after the occasion, and included in the published poem. "It is so completely imbedded in the structure of the ode," says Scudder, "that it is difficult to think of it as an afterthought. It is easy to perceive that while the glow of composition and of recitation was still upon him, Lowell suddenly conceived this splendid illustration, and indeed climax of the utterance, of the Ideal which is so impressive in the fifth stanza . . . Into these threescore lines Lowell has poured a conception of Lincoln, which may justly be said to be to-day the accepted idea which Americans hold of their great President. It was the final expression of the judgment which had slowly been forming in Lowell's own mind."

In a letter to Richard Watson Gilder, Lowell says: "The passage about Lincoln was not in the ode as originally recited, but added immediately after. More than eighteen months before, however, I had written about Lincoln in the *North American Review* — an article that pleased him. I *did* divine him earlier than most men of the Brahmin caste."

It is a singular fact that the other great New England poets, Longfellow, Whittier, and Holmes, had almost nothing to say about Lincoln.

150. **Wept with the passion,** etc.: An article in the *Atlantic*

Monthly for June, 1865, began with this passage: "The funeral procession of the late President of the United States has passed through the land from Washington to his final resting-place in the heart of the prairies. Along the line of more than fifteen hundred miles his remains were borne, as it were, through continued lines of the people; and the number of mourners and the sincerity and unanimity of grief was such as never before attended the obsequies of a human being; so that the terrible catastrophe of his end hardly struck more awe than the majestic sorrow of the people."

170. **Outward grace is dust:** An allusion to Lincoln's awkward and rather unkempt outward appearance.

173. **Supple-tempered will:** One of the most pronounced traits of Lincoln's character was his kindly, almost femininely gentle and sympathetic spirit. With this, however, was combined a determination of steel.

175–178. **Nothing of Europe here:** There was nothing of Europe in him, or, if anything, it was of Europe in her early ages of freedom before there was any distinction of slave and master, groveling Russian Serf and noble Lord or Peer.

180. **One of Plutarch's men:** The distinguished men of Greece and Rome whom Plutarch immortalized in his *Lives* are accepted as types of human greatness.

182. **Innative:** Inborn, natural.

187. **He knew to bide his time:** He knew how to bide his time, as in Milton's *Lycidas*, "He knew himself to sing." Recall illustrations of Lincoln's wonderful patience and faith.

198. **The first American:** In a prose article, Lowell calls him "The American of Americans." Compare Tennyson's "The last great Englishman," in the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*. Stanza IV of Tennyson's ode should be compared with this Lincoln stanza.

202. **Along whose course, etc.:** Along the course leading to the "inspiring goal." The conjunction of the words "pole" and "axles" easily leads to a confusion of metaphor in the passage. The imagery is from the ancient chariot races

232. **Pæan:** A pæan, originally a hymn to Apollo, usually of thanksgiving, is a song of triumph, any loud and joyous song.

236. **Dear ones:** Underwood says in his biography of Lowell: "In the privately printed edition of the poem the names of eight of the poet's kindred are given. The nearest in blood are the nephews, General Charles Russell Lowell, killed at Winchester, Lieutenant James Jackson Lowell, at Seven Pines, and Captain William Lowell Putnam, at Ball's Bluff. Another relative was the heroic Colonel Robert G. Shaw, who fell in the assault on Fort Wagner."

As a special memorial of Colonel Shaw, Lowell wrote the poem, *Memoriae Positum.* With deep tenderness he refers to his nephews in "*Mr. Hosea Biglow to the Editor of the Atlantic Monthly*":

"Why, hain't I held 'em on my knee?
Did n't I love to see 'em growin',
Three likely lads ez wal could be,
Hahnsome an' brave an' not tu knowin'?
I set an' look into the blaze
Whose natur', jes' like theirn, keeps climbin',
Ez long 'z it lives, in shinin' ways,
An' half despise myself for rhymin'.

Wut's words to them whose faith an' truth
On War's red techstone rang true metal,
Who ventered life an' love an' youth
For the gret prize o' death in battle?
To him who, deadly hurt, agen
Flashed on afore the charge's thunder,
Tippin' with fire the bolt of men
Thet rived the Rebel line asunder?"

243. When Moses sent men to "spy out" the Promised Land, they reported a land that "floweth with milk and honey," and they "came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut

down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates and of the figs" (*Numbers* xiii.)

245. Compare the familiar line in Gray's *Elegy:*

"The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

and Tennyson's line, in the *Ode to the Duke of Wellington:*

"The path of duty was the way of glory."

In a letter to T. W. Higginson, who was editing the *Harvard Memorial Biographies,* in which he was to print the ode, Lowell asked to have the following passage inserted at this point:

"Virtue treads paths that end not in the grave,
But through those constellations go
That shed celestial influence on the brave.
If life were but to draw this dusty breath
That doth our wits enslave,
And with the crowd to hurry to and fro,
Seeking we know not what, and finding death,
These did unwisely; but if living be,
As some are born to know,
The power to ennoble, and inspire
In other souls our brave desire
For fruit, not leaves, of Time's immortal tree,
These truly live, our thought's essential fire,
And to the saner," etc.

Lowell's remark in *The Cathedral,* that "second thoughts are prose," might be fairly applied to this emendation. Fortunately, the passage was never inserted in the ode.

255. **Orient:** The east, morning; hence youth, aspiration, hope. The figure is continued in l. 271.

262. **Who now shall sneer?** In a letter to Mr. J. B Thayer, who had criticized this strophe, Lowell admits "that there is a certain narrowness in it as an expression of

the popular feeling as well as my own. I confess I have never got over the feeling of wrath with which (just after the death of my nephew Willie) I read in an English paper that nothing was to be hoped of an army officered by tailors' apprentices and butcher boys." But Lowell asks his critic to observe that this strophe "leads naturally" to the next, and "that I there justify" the sentiment.

265. **Roundhead and Cavalier:** In a general way, it is said that New England was settled by the Roundheads, or Puritans, of England, and the South by the Cavaliers or Royalists.

272–273. **Plantagenets:** A line of English kings, founded by Henry II, called also the House of Anjou, from their French origin. The *House of Hapsburg* is the Imperial family of Austria. The *Guelfs* were a great political party in the Middle Ages, in Italy, representing the Pope in the bitter struggles with the *Ghibellines*, who represented the Emperor.

323. With this passage read the last two stanzas of *Mr. Hosea Biglow to the Editor of the Atlantic Monthly*, beginning:

> "Come, Peace! not like a mourner bowed
> For honor lost and dear ones wasted,
> But proud, to meet a people proud,
> With eyes that tell of triumphs tasted!"

328. **Helm:** The helmet, the part of ancient armor for protecting the head, used here as the symbol of war.

343. Upon receiving the news that the war was ended, Lowell wrote to his friend, Charles Eliot Norton: "The news, my dear Charles, is from Heaven. I felt a strange and tender exaltation. I wanted to laugh and I wanted to cry, and ended by holding my peace and feeling devoutly thankful. There is something magnificent in having a country to love."

EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

The following questions are taken from recent examination papers of the Examination Board established by the Association of Schools and Colleges in the Middle States and Maryland, and of the Regents of the State of New York. Generally only one question on *The Vision of Sir Launfal* is included in the examination paper for each year.

Under what circumstances did the "vision" come to Sir Launfal? What was the vision? What was the effect upon him?

What connection have the preludes in the *Vision of Sir Launfal* with the main divisions which they precede? What is their part in the poem as a whole?

Contrast Sir Launfal's treatment of the leper at their first meeting with his treatment at their second.

1. Describe a scene from the *Vision of Sir Launfal.*

2. Describe the hall of the castle as Sir Launfal saw it on Christmas eve.

> "The soul partakes the season's youth . .
> What wonder if Sir Launfal now
> Remembered the keeping of his vow?"

Give the meaning of these lines, and explain what you think is Lowell's purpose in the preface from which they are taken. Give the substance of the corresponding preface to the other part of the poem, and account for the difference between the two.

Describe the scene as it might have appeared to one standing just outside the castle gate, as Sir Launfal emerged from his castle in his search for the Holy Grail.

Compare the *Ancient Mariner* and the *Vision of Sir Launfal* with regard to the representation of a moral idea in each.

Explain the meaning of Sir Launfal's vision and show how it affected his conduct.

Describe an ideal summer day as portrayed in the *Vision of Sir Launfal*.

Quote at least ten lines.

Discuss, with illustrations, Lowell's descriptions in the *Vision of Sir Launfal*, touching on *two* of the following points: — (*a*) beauty, (*b*) vividness, (*c*) attention to details.

Write a description of winter as given in Part Second.

Outline in tabular form the story of Sir Launfal's search for the Holy Grail; be careful to include in your outline the time, the place, the leading characters, and the leading events in their order.

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